3-1-1964

James Thurber: Owl and nightingale of the twentieth century

Marlys Hedelund Noonan

JAMES THURBER: OWL AND NIGHTINGALE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of English

of the

Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies

University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Marlys Hedelund Noonan

March 1964

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

Robert D. Harper, English
Chairman Department

Graduate Committee

Name	Department
[illegible]	[illegible]
Warren Y. Gore	
Ralph M. Wardle	English

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Once a small boy wrote letters to James Thurber, asking him how to dedicate a book. "I told him that he could dedicate it 'To Mom' or 'To Madge Mudge,' or 'To Pop,' but I suggested that if he ever did write a book, the most fitting dedication would probably go like this: 'To Miss Gorby, whom, without she had learnt me English, this book never would of been written.'"

With Thurber's suggestions in mind, I have considered the following possibilities for a dedication: 'To Mom and Dad,' 'To my husband and daughter,' 'To Madge Mudge, whoever she may be,' 'To my adviser, Dr. Robert Harper, with my respect and appreciation,' and 'To James Thurber, whom, without he had been such a talented humorist, this book never would of been written.'

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

James Thurber, Twentieth Century American humorist, was both an owl and a nightingale in his writing. As an owl he took a thoughtful, serious view of the ways of men; he pondered the plight of the individual in a theory-laden, mechanical, psychological world. He was the owl of wisdom who meditated and transcribed his judgments and opinions of his fellow man. He was also an owl of darkness, for James Thurber was nearly blind all of his life.

The nightingale Thurber found happy, sweet relief in the mellow memories of youth, in his gay fairy tales for children, and in his writings about the people, pets and things of his personal world. Thurber, the nightingale, could fly away from his troubled todays to nostalgic yesterdays.

The tradition of the owl and nightingale dates back to medieval times, when debates between the two birds supposedly occurred. When the birds could not resolve their differences, they turned the dispute over to the poet, who would record it in his writing.

Traditionally the gentle nightingale represented sweetness, light, harmony, gaiety and youth. The owl was thought to be very wise and scholarly. He was a bird

of darkness, gravity, and judgment. In one poetic debate, "The Owl and the Nightingale," even the settings of the birds pointed out their contrasting natures. The nightingale sat among the blossoms on pretty boughs and sang her melodious songs for men. The owl lived in the dense thicket and sang his bleak, sharp songs to the night. Said the nightingale:

> But I all gladness with me bring.
> All men are happy when I sing;
> They all rejoice, when I appear,
> And hope for me another year.[1]

She criticized the owl for his pessimistic songs of woe which were sometimes critical and pointed. The owl replied:

> My voice is bold and not forlorn,
> It soundeth like a mighty horn;
> And thine is like a little pipe
> Made of a slender reed unripe![2]

The opposed natures of the owl and the nightingale were those of James Thurber in his humorous writing. The nightingale attitude appeared when he gaily wrote of the people and things closest to him: his family, his friends, his co-workers on the New Yorker, his pets. As he moved from the specific to the general, from man to men, he became more like the medieval owl. Although he could still

---

[1]John Manly, English Prose and Poetry (New York: no date), p. 17.

[2]Ibid., p. 15.

make his readers chuckle, he could also lead them to a more serious view of the follies of mankind. "His lethal, deceptively casual pot-shots at human foibles and frailties, continue to amaze the same people he is insulting."[3]

As one of the Twentieth Century creators of serious comedy, Thurber used a mocking tone which sometimes became cynical, as he exaggerated his ideas to prove his points. The humor of Thurber, the owl, offers two levels of meaning and interpretation.

> It is a form of humor which is also a way of saying something serious. There is a criticism of life at the bottom of it. It is serious and even somber. Unlike so much humor, it is not merely a criticism of manners -- that is, of the superficial aspects of society at a given moment -- but something more profound. His writings and also his illustrations are capable of surviving the immediate environment and time out of which they spring. To some extent they will be a document of the age they belong to.[4]

Thurber himself acknowledged the duality of his humor. He realized that some of the deepest laughter is caused by no laughing matter.

> The things we laugh at are awful while they are going on, but get funny when we look back. And other people laugh because they've been through it too ... I think humor is best that lies closest to the familiar, to that part of the familiar which is humiliating, distressing, even tragic. Humor is a kind of emotional chaos told about calmly and

---

[3]"Thurber, An Old Hand At Humor," Life, XLVIII (March 14, 1960), 103.

[4]"Priceless Gift of Laughter," Time, LVIII (July 9, 1951), 88.

> quietly in retrospect. There is always a laugh in the utterly familiar ... People can laugh out of a kind of mellowed self-pity as well as out of superiority.[5]

The closeness of humor and tragedy, of the owl and the nightingale, of love and hate, is evident in Thurber's writing. "Reflect a moment that the playthings are a bad smash-up, a financial loss, an angry motorman, a family in tears, an insane old man, a sensitive young man's untimely death, a decaying corpse---you will concede, perhaps, that unpleasantness and humorous delights are not remote."[6]

Thurber had the ability to see the humor in tragedy and to record it in such a way that his readers could share with him the comic relief of laughter. "Humor and pathos, tears and laughter, are, in the highest expression of human character and achievement, inseparable."[7]

Although several critics feel James Thurber deserves serious attention as the foremost American humorist of this century, there has been relatively little critical evaluation of his work. At this time there is no biography of Thurber; few of the literary magazines have given him serious attention. At the time of his death in 1961, his

---

[5]Max Eastman, Enjoyment of Laughter (New York: 1936), p. 88.

[6]Ibid., p. 89.

[7]James Thurber, "The Case for Comedy," Atlantic Monthly, CCVI (November, 1960), 98.

office mate at The New Yorker, E. B. White, said: "James Thurber ... added more than one man's share to the world's small store of humor and wisdom. He turned them [words] over to us in the warranted expectation that they would make us laugh, instruct us, shake us up, and keep us going. His work is largely unclassifiable, and by the end it gave him a place in history as one of the great comic artists and one of the great American humorists."[8]

The man James Thurber, owl and nightingale humorist of his age, was versatile, creative and courageous. The terms author, artist, journalist, playwright, essayist, novelist, and even actor describe this Ohio-born writer who lived from 1894 to 1961. Although his unorthodox autobiographical writings contain little of the chronology of his life, those who interviewed and wrote about Thurber put the peaks of his life in perspective. He was born in Columbus, Ohio, and with his family of two brothers, lived in an upper middle class urban home. He wrote little of his school days prior to his years at Ohio State University, where he majored in journalism. Because he wanted to do something to help the World War I efforts and was disqualified from combat because of his severe eye handicap, he dropped out of college in his senior year and accepted a

---

[8]"James Thurber," The New Yorker, XXXVII (November 11, 1961), 247.

position as a code clerk in the State Department, Washington, D. C. Two years later he was sent to the American Embassy in Paris and there he wrote for the overseas edition of the Chicago Tribune. He returned to the States in 1920, and went back to his native state where he accepted a position on the Columbus Dispatch.

In 1924 he decided to go to France for another year to do some writing, but he returned within months to pursue his goal of working with The New Yorker magazine. This urban publication, in its infancy in 1925, offered Thurber a challenge and a medium for his humor. "Unlike most humorists, Thurber was a highbrow, even when making fun of highbrows ... Many of his stories presuppose in the reader a background of culture, a whole universe of subtle and learned reference. In this respect he departs from the central American humorous tradition."[9] Thurber's departure in humor was the departure of the entire The New Yorker magazine; and just months after he returned to New York City, Thurber began his affiliation of more than thirty years with The New Yorker. During those years he wrote prolifically, and became acquainted with many of the upcoming writers of this century. He professed a deep admiration and respect for the magazine's eccentric editor, Harold Ross, whose biographer he was to become.

---

[9]Clifton Fadiman, "Reading I've Liked," Holiday, XXXIII (March, 1963), 58.

The humor, tone and moods of Thurber's writings eventually found a new medium in art. Thurber said he drew his delightfully simple cartoons to relax his nerves. One of his best known picture stories, The Last Flower, was drawn one evening between dinner and bedtime. This story which shows world destruction and eventual rebirth in the form of the flower, has been called Thurber's own obituary notice. "Of all the flowers, real and figurative, that will find their way to Thurber's last resting place, the one that will remain fresh and wiltproof is the little flower he himself drew on the last page of the lovely book."[10]

Thurber's illustrations are integral parts of Thurber's writing. Sometimes they are more difficult to interpret when taken out of context; but with his stories or essays these cartoons visibly enhance his writing. Most of these drawings and captions are "instantized"; they show one scene and give a caption, leaving the past and future of the pictured event up to the delighted viewer. Thurber's dual nature, his ambivalence, is also very much a part of his cartoons. "The human species is both horrible and wonderful. I like people and hate them at the same time. I wouldn't draw them in cartoons if I didn't think they were

---

[10]"Salute to Thurber," Saturday Review, XLIV (November 25, 1961), 17.

horrible; and I wouldn't write about them if I didn't think they were wonderful."[11]

The fact that Thurber drew at all is quite remarkable considering the impairment of his sight. Because of a childhood injury, he was left with a partial vision which diminished through the years. For the last ten years of his life, the totally blind Thurber had to dictate his stories. The days had passed when he could draw cartoons by wearing large magnifying goggles; and even in those days he had to draw the figures on three-by-four-foot boards in order to see the simple lines.[12]

It would have been logical for Thurber to draw upon the sympathy of the reader when he wrote of his poor eyesight; but self-pity was not part of his nature. What he does not say about his handicap is as significant as the humorous comments he does make. "I am not handicapped by vision. I am undistracted by distractions,"[13] he said. "My one-eighth vision happily obscures sad and ungainly sights, leaving only the vivid and the radiant."[14]

---

[11]"Priceless Gift of Laughter," p. 94

[12]"Speaking of Pictures," Life, XV (October 25, 1945), 15. See Appendix for Thurber's cartoons.

[13]Harvey Breit, "Mr. Thurber Observes a Serene Birthday," New York Times (December 4, 1949), p. 15.

[14]James Thurber, "Thurber," New York Herald Tribune XXVII (October 8, 1950), 4.

Because Thurber frequently drew squat, bald men as the partners of his figureless, sexless, lumpish women, he was frequently identified with his little men. Actually, Thurber was about 6' 1" tall, weighed 154 lbs., and he was anything but bald, with his bushy, unruly hair. "I draw the spirit of the man I am ... and I'm a pussycat."[15] He said he was not a scared, downtrodden man as were many of his characters. "One thing let's get straight. I'm not mild and gentle. Let the meek inherit the earth -- they have it coming to them. I get up mad at something every morning and think I should. I used to wake up at 4:00 A.M. and start sneezing sometimes for five hours. I tried to find out what sort of allergy I had but finally came to the conclusion it must be an allergy to consciousness."[16]

The youthful Thurber was like the nightingale: carefree, optimistic, and jovial. As he grew older he became a bit more like the owl: a seriousness coated his humor, a pessimism and impatience with mankind sometimes entered his essays, and his laughter came closer to tears. Shortly before he died he wrote a letter to his New Yorker friend, E. B. White, in which he said: "Everytime is a time for humor ... I write humor the way a surgeon operates, because

---

[15]"Thurber, An Old Hand at Humor," p. 105. See Appendix for illustration of typical Thurber male, p. 110.

[16]Ibid., p. 108.

it is a livelihood, because I have a great urge to do it, because many interesting challenges are set up and because I have the hope it may do some good."[17]

Thurber saw a seriousness creep into his Twentieth Century world, just as that melancholy began to infiltrate his humor. "The most alarming thing today ... is that all the kids are worried about the world situation. They didn't when I was young. Then the greatest menace was Halley's comet. And my Cousin Earl's motorcycle. They have things to worry about now."[18] As he grew older, Thurber had to adjust to a humor built around an era of "organization, statistics, surveys, group action, program, platform, imperatives, and the like."[19] In his last decade he worried more and more about the decline of humor in America; he found the very nature of humor incompatible with a frustrated, frightened country.

James Thurber's literary ancestors included several American humorists: Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, and Robert Benchley. Twain and Thurber had many things in common; Punch magazine, when it asked Thurber to carve his

---

[17]"Salute to Thurber," p. 17.

[18]Harvey Breit, "Mr. Thurber Observes a Serene Birthday," p. 76.

[19]James Thurber, "The Saving Grace, "Atlantic Monthly, CCIV (November, 1959), 61.

initials in a traditional table, suggested he was the greatest American humorist to follow Twain. I can feel Mark Twain looking over my shoulder right now,"[20] said Thurber as he carved.

Both Twain and Thurber had nostalgic memories of their youth. Twain's mind wandered back to the Mississippi River region while Thurber dreamed of Ohio. Both men were keen observers of their times and people; both could instruct while they entertained. Both writers used the intelligence of their hearts to supplement that of their minds; they had a warmth and compassion for their characters. Twain was a product of the frontier in America; James Thurber was a cultured urbanite. Yet both men could appeal to a wide range of readers.

Josh Billings thought he could draw laughter by making his words look like they sounded. He deliberately misspelled words in his attempts to make his dialogues more realistic. Thurber didn't carry this practice to Billings' extremes, but he sometimes made up words of his own which lay close to the familiar. In "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" he mentions the "pocketa-pocketa-pocketa" of the machines, and his strange medical diagnoses sound quite official. Thurber's humor was more refined and less

---

[20]Charles Brady, "What Thurber Saw," Commonweal, LXXV (December 8, 1961), 274-276.

localized than that of Josh Billings.

Thurber shared Artemus Ward's struggles with the English language, but he made gay humor of his inability to stay out of the which-mire trap, or his weakness for the split infinitive.[21] Artemus Ward did not achieve the high level of Thurber's humor.

Robert Benchley, the contemporary American humorist who slightly preceded Thurber, is frequently compared with him. The two men were good friends who took pride in one another's work. Thurber said Benchley had suggested the character Walter Mitty several years before Thurber's story was written; and Benchley was an enthusiastic critic of Thurber's cartoons.

Both of these humorists relied on the first person style in many of their pieces. Both dealt with frustrated characters in rebellion; both wrote "satire that has been expanded so far that it has lost a great deal of its sting."[22] Both men illustrated some of their stories. "Mr. Thurber — like Mr. Benchley — is victimized by inanimate things; he lives a life which is ruined by

---

[21]James Thurber, "Ladies' and Gentlemen's Guide to Modern English Usage," Scholastic, XXV (September 22 and October 20, 1934), 8.

[22]Walter Blair, Horse Sense in American Humor (New York: 1962), p. 292.

tremendous trifles."[23] Benchley frequently wrote about children; Thurber seldom mentions them. Both men wrote several pieces about marriage; however, "Thurber much more often gives the female a direct and central part in the male's humiliation by his world."[24]

Thurber's other contemporaries in the field of American humor include S. J. Perelman, Ogden Nash, Clarence Day and E. B. White. Although each of these men interpreted his times and made a contribution to literature, the coming years will reveal whether any of them surpass James Thurber. "With his piercingly sane insanity, he truly enriched American life ... there were no funny men left who belong so securely to American literature,"[25] when Thurber died in 1961.

Among Thurber's contributions to American literature is a little fellow named Walter Mitty and his dual world of dreams and reality; a significant offering in the realm of fables; a warm intelligent humor which appeals to readers on several levels. "Thurber demonstrated that intelligence and knowledge can be assets rather than liabilities in the field of literary entertainment. He raptly contemplated

---

[23] Ibid., p. 285.

[24] Norris Yates, The American Humorist (Ames: 1964), p. 282.

[25] "Jim," Newsweek, LVIII (November 13, 1961), 36.

myriad incongruities and frustrations of Twentieth-Century urban life, then recreated them with the bewildered amusement that is his hallmark."[26]

He could laugh at himself and he could laugh at and with others. "He was a dreamer who knew the longings of ordinary men -- to stuff their wives and put them on the mantelpiece, to bet the old plantation on an uncaught ace, while the paddle wheel goes pocketa pocketa."[27] "In his stories and cartoons Thurber shows society as a perpetual war, sometimes between men and women, sometimes between institutions. Thurber also handles the eccentric and the insane with a great deal of sympathy, implying that abnormality is not an unreasonable way of adjusting to modern civilization."[28]

As a fabulist Thurber innovated a special twist to the story, not used by earlier fabulists. He did use the animals to portray the foolish ways of man and he did lead the reader to a moral conclusion. But just when the reader is sure of the outcome of the story, Thurber gives it a slight twist which is refreshing and amusing.

---

[26]Brom Weber, editor, An Anthology of American Humor (New York: 1962), p. 513.

[27]"James Thurber, Aphorist for an Anxious Age," Time, LXXVIII (November 10, 1961), 81.

[28]Leonard Feinberg, The Satirist (Ames: 1963), p. 146.

Thurber's main topics were the battles between the sexes, his personal life, animals, and the many complexities which have burdened Twentieth Century life. In each of these areas he used a special kind of humor which ranged from the purely satirical to the exaggerated and ridiculous. He detested conformity, hypocrisy, self-pity, false supremacy, and female domination. He preferred the simpler, more natural way of life around the turn of the century when he was back in Columbus, Ohio, to the world of the last three decades where he saw people concerned with psychoanalyzing, systematizing, organizing, classifying, and mechanizing.

The closer Thurber's writings were to his personal world, the more Thurber assumed the attitude of the nightingale. The further they spun their way outward toward generalizations on mankind, society, communications or man-made laws and standards, the more Thurber approached the qualities legend attributes to the owl. He was concerned with the relationship of man to himself, man to nature, man to woman, and man to the man-made. The progression of these topics for Thurber forms a transition from the nightingale to the owl.

CHAPTER II

THE PERSONAL WORLD OF JAMES THURBER

James Thurber had several major obstacles in his personal world: near-blindness; driving ambition; an eccentric editor-boss, Harold Ross. These opponents might well have caused Thurber to view his world like a cynical owl; but, instead, he chose to be the gay nightingale, remembering the happy and humorous. Thurber didn't stoop to self-pity; he didn't allow his opponents to thwart his creative abilities.

Thurber's autobiographical writing is an unorthodox flight from humorous peak to humorous peak. His intense interest in others led him to emphasize their roles in events. Consequently, he did not give a chronology of his life's events nor did he bother to analyze his development as a writer. He expected his readers to assume his nightingale mood toward his life; he didn't dwell on the pain and embarrassment which circumscribed his own time.[1] His memoirs reflect the events which brought him happiness and joy; they were delightful diversions from the times in his life when he felt it was necessary to assume the role of the wise and serious owl.

---

[1] James Thurber, My Life and Hard Times (New York: 1933), p. 12.

Perhaps Thurber's greatest liability in life was his poor eyesight. He seldom wrote of his handicap, and he did not want his readers or friends to share his pain by extending useless pity. Certainly among the assets in his life were his remarkable mind and his deep humility. Thurber could remember events for years, in minute detail. This memory was enhanced by his ability to sense irony, to make intelligent perceptions, and to construct astute judgments. His mind was a fertile source of memories for his writing. Unfortunately, that same remarkable memory sometimes shut itself off, and Thurber could not remember where he had taken his laundry, left his coat or put his hat.

Thurber blended his memories with exaggeration and humor to recreate events of his childhood. One of the two most important places in his life was the Columbus, Ohio, of his boyhood. (The other was New York, where he did most of his writing.) Although Thurber said it was difficult for him to write autobiographically, he filled the pages of My Life and Hard Times with hilarious accounts of his escapades as a child. "When I sit down to write the story of my life, all I can think of is Mrs. Rabbit, and Hershey bars, and the B.V.D.'s that came within two bits of costing five bits."[2] He claimed the first important event in his

---

[2]James Thurber, Let Your Mind Alone (New York: 1937), p. 184.

life was when, at the age of thirty-three, he began raising Scottish terrier dogs.

"Thurber's slant on the world was partly determined by the impact made on the boy from Columbus, Ohio, of glittering New York."[3] Thurber frequently drifted in his thoughts to his days in Columbus; he found happy refuge in his memories of Ohio around the turn of the century. The baseball diamond near the school, the street where he lived, the family car that would never start, were as close to him as his nostalgic thoughts. He missed Columbus's smaller town atmosphere, the slower pace of life, the family-centered activities. He missed people who were unbothered by the ids and egos they didn't know existed; people who, around 1900, didn't even know of a man named Freud. His dreams were dusted with quaint old fashioned treasures: dining-room fireplaces, wrought-iron pegs for hats and coats, crystal chandeliers, family portraits, houses designed for children and their play.[4] This was the Columbus, Ohio, Thurber could only reclaim in his mellowed memories.

When the nightingale Thurber talked about the people

---

[3]Clifton Fadiman, "Reading I've Liked," Holiday, XXXIII (March, 1963), 57.

[4]James Thurber, Thurber Album (New York: 1952), pp. 44-45.

in his life, he flitted over their imperfections and accepted them totally, with a warmth and compassion. "The adults around me when I was in short pants were neither so glamorous nor so attentive. They consisted mainly of eleven maternal great aunts, all Methodists, who were staunch believers in physic, mustard plasters, and Scripture, and it was part of their dogma that artistic tendencies should be treated in the same way as hiccups or hysterics."[5] When Thurber described in detail his aunts, parents, or the servants in the home, he didn't bother to analyze their minds or motivations. He ignored the whys and concentrated on the whats of the situations. He usually remembered the zany things his people might prefer forgotten, such as their superstitions and idiosyncrasies.

The fun Thurber poked at his characters is fun from his heart, not from a sense of superiority. He expected his readers to accept these people with his devotion. When he wrote of his aunts, for example, he said one had a burglar phobia which lasted over forty years.[6] Another was convinced burglars would get in the house and blow chloroform under her door each night. Catastrophes, post mortems, premonitions, and unwanted babies were the special

---

[5]James Thurber, The Thurber Carnival (New York: 1945), p. 33

[6]Thurber, My Life and Hard Times, p. 20.

interests of another aunt. When Aunt Mary was hospitalized at the age of 93, "starched hussies and wenches, some of them seventy years younger than she was, told her that she couldn't smoke any more and took her pipe away."[7]

Thurber retained this same amused detachment when he wrote of the many servants who had worked for the Thurbers. Once again the reader could enjoy his exaggerated accounts of these superstitious, not too intelligent, maids who were unashamed or unaware of their oddities. These servants were proud people who had their own special ways of adjusting to their seemingly drab occupation.[8] One maid, Belle, purposely burned her finger on a steaming teakettle, to test the value of the pain killers she had purchased at a local tent show. Another maid chased Thurber's father up and down the stairs one night with the conviction that he was the Anti-Christ. Another was in constant fear of being hypnotized; Della, who frequently spoke with malapropisms, said her sister got tuberculosis from her teeth and "it went all through her symptom."[9]

Perhaps the most nearly immortalized of the Thurber

---

[7]Thurber, Thurber Album, p. 27.

[8]Thurber, My Life and Hard Times, "A Sequence of Servants," pp. 68-76.

[9]James Thurber, My World and Welcome to It (New York: 1942), p. 7.

maid collection was Gertie Straub, a big ruddy woman whose hobby was collecting pints of rye. One night Gertie returned to the Thurber home in the wee hours, and began bumping into the furniture. "'Who's down there?' called mother from upstairs. 'It's me,' said Gertie, 'Gertie Straub.' 'What are you doing?' demanded mother. 'Dusting,' said Gertie."[10]

With the same fond exaggeration, Thurber even told his mother's secrets. He said she was an innate actress who would perform whenever an audience would listen. She loved to concoct pranks on the family or neighbors. She

> thought -- or rather knew -- that it was dangerous to drive an automobile without gasoline: it fried the valves or something ... Her greatest dread, however, was the Victrola ... She had the idea that the Victrola might blow up ... The telephone she was comparatively at peace with, except of course, during storms, when for some reason or other she always took the receiver off the hook and let it hang ... her own mother lived the latter years of her life in the horrible suspicion that electricity was dripping invisibly all over the house.[11]

Thurber indicated that each member of his family was addicted to absurdity. Even his senile grandfather had his special moment when he became convinced that the Civil War cavalry was after him. And a great uncle Zenas caught a disease killing the neighborhood chestnuts; a tree

---

[10]Thurber, My Life and Hard Times, p. 69. See Thurber cartoon, Appendix, p. 112.

[11]Ibid., pp. 31-33. See Thurber cartoon, Appendix, p. 112.

surgeon had to spray him.[12] These funny people and events made Thurber chuckle; he could transform his and their escapades into a unique autobiography. Neurotic maids, maternal aunts, mechanical monsters, and tree-diseased relatives bloomed uproariously in his writing. "In his stories and cartoons Thurber shows society as a perpetual war, sometimes between men and women, sometimes between institutions. Thurber also handles the eccentric and the insane with a great deal of sympathy, implying that abnormality is not an unreasonable way of adjusting to modern civilization."[13]

He had the ability to fill his pages with common folk whose humorous plights were part of their daily lives. "When people live in their special and peculiar spheres, uproarious misunderstandings compose the daily round; Thurber also confronts the predicament of the ordinary man in his own time."[14]

Thurber, the humorist, defined all humorists as restless souls who have a genius for getting into minor difficulties: "They walk into the wrong apartments, they

---

[12] Ibid., p. 36. For illustration, see Appendix, p. 113.

[13] Leonard Feinberg, The Satirist (Ames: 1963), p. 146.

[14] Robert Elias, "James Thurber: The Primitive, the Innocent, the Individual," American Scholar, XXVII (Summer, 1958), 357.

drink furniture polish for stomach bitters, they drive their cars into prize tulip beds of haughty neighbors. ... The little wheels of their invention are set in motion by the damp hand of melancholy. Such a writer moves about restlessly wherever he goes, ready to get the hell out at the drop of a piepan or the lift of a skirt. His gestures are the ludicrous reflexes of the maladjusted."[15] Humorists, said Thurber, magnify small events and diminish matters of national importance.

This damp hand of lonely melancholy was a paradox in Thurber's nature and writing. While he could paint gay pictures of people in extremely funny situations, he could step away from such scenes and realize that it was a cruel world that caused such a response. The neurotic maids who added humor to the Thurber home and writing, were, in fact, unhappy souls destined to go on being maids and seeking whatever maids seek.

Thurber seldom told about material things; he gave few clues to the status of his family. Evidently they belonged to the upper middle-class, for he mentions the hired help and the automobile they owned soon after the mechanism was invented. It seemed that the Thurbers were well accepted and respected in the community; many of the townspeople were included in Thurber's character sketches. For

---

[15]Thurber, My Life and Hard Times, p. 10.

instance, there was a traveling medicine man who came to Columbus; he had an honest face and a crooked deck. The little boy, Jim Thurber, found in old Doc Marlow a combination of good and evil; he found it hard to reconcile his great admiration for such an "evil" man.[16]

Another of his favorite Columbusites was Mrs. Margery Albright, a medic who didn't rely on modern medical discoveries for her practice as a town midwife and herb pharmacist. Aunt Margery, with her intuition and tested cures, could prescribe treatment for ailments ranging from overdue babies to nervous exhaustion. She advocated cold black coffee for depressed spirits, and she fascinated Thurber by her habit of drinking large gulps of castor oil.

On the night of December 8, 1894, Aunt Margery was called to the Thurber home to help deliver a baby boy. When the doctor arrived a short time later, she confided in him: "He has too much hair on his head for a male child ... Ain't it true that they don't grow up to be bright?"[17] Aunt Margery, that bleak winter night, was afraid James Thurber, outstanding humorist of the Twentieth Century, might not even master the English language.

All these Columbus people woven in the tapestry of

---

[16]Thurber, Thurber Carnival, pp. 100-104.

[17]Thurber, Thurber Album, p. 89.

Thurber's youth were treated with warmth and compassion. They were quite capable of meeting their problems without the elaborate theories, systems and mechanisms which were to bother the humorist in his adulthood. With nightingale abandon, Thurber, in his autobiographical writing, omitted such failures as his first story, Horse Sandusky. He didn't slow his pace for introspection or self-pity; his humility kept him from flaunting his honors and achievements.

The interlude between Thurber's Columbus days and his New Yorker career, spanning the eleven years from 1914 to 1925, found him attending Ohio State University, working for the American government, reporting for the Columbus Dispatch, and spending a year writing in France. These were days of groping, when Thurber was trying to find his professional place in life.

The university experiences of James Thurber were reported as a conglomeration of interesting people and ironic events similar to those of his youth. Once again he gave no special time sequence to his autobiographical accounts. Thurber chuckled at people such as the dumb football player, Wolenciewcz, who couldn't name even one form of transportation for the economics' instructor.[18]

---

[18]For Thurber's illustrations of university scenes recorded in My Life and Hard Times, see Appendix, p.

He remembered the biology instructor who spent many frustrated hours trying to help Thurber see beyond his own eyelash, when looking in the microscope.

Thurber's military problems began during his ROTC days when the classes studied Civil War tactics while the World War was going on at the time. He didn't like military science, particularly when the studies were outdated, so he failed ROTC each year. By the close of his college days he claimed the Western Conference ROTC drill or marching record.[19]

One of Thurber's favorite people on campus was his literature instructor, Joseph Russel Taylor, with whom he shared a love for Henry James and Willa Cather. Thurber recorded one of those ironic campus events that happened in Taylor's first class of the semester: "'I do not expect you to take notes in this class,' he said. Forty of the fifty young men and women present wrote that down in their brand-new notebooks with their brand-new fountain pens."[20] Taylor was an owl in Thurber's nightingale youth, for he said that youth couldn't hold a candle to maturity, and that nothing genuine need fear the test of laughter.[21] He

---

[19]Thurber, My Life and Hard Times, p. 98. See p. 114.

[20]Thurber, Thurber Album, p. 139.

[21]Ibid., p. 149.

spent many hours interpreting Henry James with his students; and years later, Thurber wrote several critical essays on the novelist. "Few artists with the physical ability to see, appreciate the truth known to all those without sight: that there is a dark blindness and a lighted blindness. Henry James was at home in the dark and in the light and in the shadows that lie between."[22] Thurber found compatibility with James; he too was at home in the darkness of his blinded eyes.

After Thurber left college, he wanted to do something in the war effort; but his eyesight would not allow his entry into the armed services. He did, however, serve four months with the draft board, due to a clerical error which caused him to take numerous physicals only to be hastily rejected for service. Following this tour of "draft board duty" he went to Washington, D.C., and became a code clerk for the Department of State. Two years later he was sent to the American Embassy in Paris, where he remained for another two years. While in France he began his first journalism assignment, as a reporter for the overseas edition of the Chicago Tribune. Although these were the immediate post-war years, Thurber does not mention the war

---

[22]James Thurber, Lanterns and Lances (New York: 1960), p. 97.

or its effects on the Europe he saw. Instead, he tells of the customs of the European people, and of a few of the people he befriended. Two of these were Olympy and Maria, a French couple who were part of his bargain to rent a village cottage. The caretakers were humble people, but as Thurber later wrote, "Olympy had a wistful air of ancien regime about him."[23] Perhaps in Olympy, Thurber saw a remnant of the proud people of Columbus, Ohio.

When Thurber returned from his first jaunt to France, he accepted a position on an Ohio Dispatch. He served under a difficult editor, Norman Kuehner, who believed the school of experience was far superior to the school of journalism. Kuehner delighted in giving cub reporters grueling tests of stamina, but apparently Thurber easily passed. Kuehner always predicted Thurber would end up in New York City; he may not have given Thurber the New York dream, but he did try in vain to keep him on the staff of the Dispatch. Later, Thurber found Kuehner was in many ways like the New Yorker's eccentric editor, Harold Ross.

One of his other close friends during these early journalism days was cartoonist Billy Ireland. This artist may not have influenced Thurber's drawings, but he did have an interesting philosophy: "If you can make a man laugh

---

[23]Thurber, My World and Welcome To It, p. 235.

you can spit in his eye."[24] This technique of making people laugh at themselves was carried on by Thurber in his writing and cartooning. Billy was another devoted Ohioan; but unlike Thurber, he refused offers to leave his native state.

After Thurber parted from the Dispatch in 1924, he returned to France for a year. When he came back to the States, he had few written results of his year abroad, $10 in his pocket, and a strong ambition to become affiliated with The New Yorker magazine. He "began sending short pieces to the New Yorker, eating in doughnut shops, occasionally pilfering canapes at cocktail parties."[25] But the articles were returned almost as quickly as he sent them; so Thurber tried to find small assignments on other publications while he waited for his New Yorker break. Finally, in February of 1929, a casual acquaintance, E. B. (Andy) White, introduced Thurber to the youthful, eccentric editor, Harold Ross. That day Thurber began his thirty-year association with the magazine.

Many outstanding writers and artists were affiliated with this new kind of magazine. The New Yorker was largely

---

[24]Thurber, Thurber Album, p. 199.

[25]James Thurber, The Years with Ross (New York: 1957), p. 37.

responsible for the rise of a new humor disavowing interest in "rural and small town readers so important as part of the humorists' audience of the past: 'The New Yorker (said its Prospectus) will be the magazine which is not edited for the old lady in Dubuque. It will not be concerned with what she is thinking about... The New Yorker is a magazine avowedly published for metropolitan audiences and thereby will escape the influence which hampers most national publication.'"[26] This new, urbanized humor attracted writers such as E. B. White, Clifton Fadiman, Robert Benchley, Wolcott Gibbs, and Dorothy Parker. The staff worked long, hard hours under a perfectionist editor, Harold Ross, whose compliments supplemented their undernourished salaries. Thurber recorded the tempo of The New Yorker years in his biography, The Years With Ross, in which he takes the usual dual view: nightingale and owl, gay and grave, light and heavy hearted.

One of Thurber's greatest challengers was Harold Ross. The two men were approximately the same age, and they were both temperamental and super-charged with restless energy. These likenesses were almost their repulsions to friendship; it took several years for them to become something more than business associates. When Ross wanted Thurber to carry the load, Thurber seemed unwilling or incapable because he shared his editor's weaknesses. Neither

---

[26]Robert Spiller, A Time of Harvest (New York: 1962), p. 55.

man had organizational or financial ability. Ross named Thurber his managing editor; Thurber endured the post for six months and worked his way down to the reporter's position he enjoyed. Because of their inability to balance finances, both men were menaces to the organized business department of the magazine.

Neither man was compatible with machines. Thurber claimed a "magnificent ignorance of the workings of a gas engine and a profound disinterest in its oily secrets."[27] Andy White, who tried to teach Ross to drive, said of him: "He did not have a mechanical bone in his body, and if anybody needed God for his co-pilot, Ross did."[28] Even small mechanisms were menaces to the pair: Ross had trouble with paper clips; Thurber got tangled in typewriter ribbons and was frustrated by self-adjusting card tables.

Both men had at least one broken marriage, and at one time their bachelorhood was simultaneous. Thurber was married twice, and he seldom mentioned his spouses. Ross "was married three times to women, and once, for keeps to The New Yorker magazine."[29]

---

[27]Thurber, Thurber Carnival, p. 37.

[28]Thurber, The Years With Ross, p. 186.

[29]Ibid., p. 167.

Although these men had paradoxical natures, Ross was a little more harsh and sharp-tongued in expressing his feelings. Members of the staff had to learn which of Ross's caustic comments were sincere and which of them resulted from his sleeplessness and ulcers.

Writing a biography of a man who wouldn't sit still in anybody's mind long enough for a full length portrait, was quite a challenge for Thurber. As their acquaintance lengthened and strengthened to friendship, Thurber began to have a deep respect for Harold Ross. Somehow Thurber had to convince the readers that this man, who was both "complified and simplicated," who knew little about poetry or novels, who made broad generalizations and profusely used dramatic gestures and profanity, was indeed the ingenious creator and editor of the sophisticated New Yorker.

So Thurber wrote a biography with the same happy approach he used in his autobiography: "After six years of thinking about it, I realized that to do justice to Harold Ross I must write about him the way he talked and lived -- leaping from peak to peak. What follows here is a monologue montage."[30] In presenting a man such as Ross, he blended with his gay nightingale approach, some of the

---

[30] Ibid., p. 12.

owl to judge those peaks that were important to Harold Ross. He had to show the fondness and respect others had for this man, in spite of his eccentricities.

Thurber reported Andy White's obituary comments on Ross: "When you took leave of Ross after a calm or stormy meeting, he always ended with a phrase that has become as much a part of the office as the paint on the walls. He would wave his limp hand, gesturing you away. 'All right,' he would say. 'God bless you.' Considering Ross's temperament and habits, this was a rather odd expression. He usually took God's name in vain if he took it at all. But when he sent you away with this benediction, which he uttered briskly and affectionately, and in which he and God seemed all scrambled together, it carried a warmth and sincerity that never failed to carry over."[31]

Ross felt he was the literary patriarch of the New Yorker family, and he constantly defended writers against publishers. His daily worries might include his "country bumpkin" writers Thurber and White, the World War II which happened only to him, the consideration God owed his magazine, and sex, which would not stay out of The New Yorker office or writing. Perfection, not wealth, was his goal; he and his staff would spend endless hours rechecking

---

[31] Ibid., p. 277.

spelling, story data, and syntax. He approached the Tuesday afternoon art meetings with that same scrutiny. Thurber's favorite story concerning these art meetings was passed on to him by New Yorker writer Peter De Vries. "The cover of the board showed a Model T driving along a dusty country road. Ross turned his sharpshooting eye on it for a full two minutes. 'Take this down, Miss Terry,' he said. 'Better dust.'"[32]

Thurber's own cartoons were a source of bewilderment and pride for Ross. The first time he looked at a Thurber scribble, he said, "How in the Hell did you get the idea that you could draw?"[33] With the encouragement of White and Robert Benchley, Thurber continued his doodles. Ross became alarmed when one of Thurber's cartoons was about to appear in the magazine. The drawing showed a man talking to his friend. Beside him was his wife, and up on the high bookcase was a woman, crouched on all fours. Said the man to his friend, "That's my first wife up there, and this is the present Mrs. Harris." Ross frantically telephoned Thurber and demanded: "Is the woman on the bookcase alive or stuffed, or just dead?' I told him I would give the matter my gravest consideration and

---

[32] Ibid., p. 50.

[33] Ibid., p. 58.

call him back, and I did. 'She has to be alive,' I told him. 'My doctor says a dead woman couldn't support herself on all fours, and my taxidermist says you can't stuff a woman.' 'Then goddam it, what's she doing naked in the house of her former husband and his second wife?' I told him he had me there, and that I wasn't responsible for the behavior of the people I drew."[34]

Ross's interest in Thurber as a writer, cartoonist, and friend was evident in his feelings about Thurber's failing eyesight.

> If I wrote of Ross's constant concern and kindliness about my eyes, it would embarrass him in heaven, as it would embarrass him on earth if he were still here. He was not a demonstrative man, or he thought he wasn't, but anyone who knew him well could see through the profane bluster and gruffness that covered great solicitude for the men and women he loved.... He began by taking my drawings as a joke ... and ended up doing his darndest as my disability increased, to keep the drawings going by every kind of ingenious hook or crook. After I got so I could no longer see to draw, even with black grease crayon on large sheets of yellow paper, Ross began a campaign, recorded in a series of letters he wrote me, to reprint old drawings of mine with new captions."[35]

Ross gave Thurber's writing his full attention, and he frequently sent Thurber detailed memos of possible misinterpretations of his writing. Thurber was indebted to Ross for his job, a binding friendship, and the influence

---

[34] Ibid., p. 61. For Thurber cartoon, see Appendix, p. 115.

[35] Ibid., p. 64.

Ross had on Thurber's writing and style.

Just as Ross was Thurber's literary guardian, Robert Benchley was the guardian of his art.[36] In 1932 Thurber published a cartoon which showed a woman and man in bed, and a huge seal peering at them over their headboard. "All right, have it your way -- you heard a seal bark," said the lumpish wife. Benchley sent Thurber a "Truly ecstatic telegram ... there was nobody whose praise a cartoonist or humorist would rather have had."[37] Benchley's influence on Thurber went beyond the art to his short stories: "Benchley beat me to a lot of things ... His dreamer, cool and witty on the witness stand (1930) and in heroic period (1932) antedated a little old day dreamer of my own named Mitty."[38]

The other important influence on the writing of Thurber was his office mate, E. B. White. Thurber didn't tell us exactly how White made his contribution, but the two men collaborated on the Talk of the Town column of The New Yorker for several years, and in 1929 they wrote an uproarious parody of modern sex manuals, Is Sex Necessary?

---

[36] Ibid., p. 59.

[37] Ibid., p. 55. For Thurber cartoon, see Appendix, p. 115.

[38] Ibid., p. 149.

White picked up the scraps of Thurber's cartoon doodles and saved them. Eventually he convinced Thurber they should be published. The amazed Thurber began a diligent effort to perfect his cartoons and was admonished by White: "If you ever got good you'd be mediocre."[39] White even analyzed Thurber's mind by saying, "His thoughts have always been a tangle of baseball scores, Civil War tactical problems, Henry James, personal maladjustments, terrier puppies, literary tide rips, ancient myths, and modern apprehensions."[40] White also was aware of that melancholy loneliness and the presence of the owl qualities in some of Thurber's writing and drawing.

Perhaps it is fitting that the last mentioned of Thurber's personal opponents, his blindness, was perhaps his greatest. But Thurber seldom had as much concern for his own handicap as his friends expressed. Certainly this disability did not make Thurber an owl of darkness in spirit; instead, he transformed his handicap into a challenging asset by proving he could master literature, art, and life without perfect or even adequate vision. Others admired Thurber for his lack of self-pity; they were willing to make allowances for his handicap which Thurber

---

[39] Ibid., p. 57.

[40] "Jim," Newsweek, LVIII (November 13, 1961), 36.

would not make for himself. "Nothing has fortified my faith in human nature more than the fact that in 1953, when my wife underwent a successful [retinal] detachment operation, eight people in America and two in England offered to give us one of their good eyes."[41]

Courageously, he told of the funny incidents his increasing blindness caused. One day the colored maid stepped on and broke his glasses. Looking out into the yard, he thought he saw some chickens running around. So he riddled them -- or rather, he stoned the tomato plants."[42] "Some day, I suppose, when the clouds are heavy and the rain is coming down and the pressure of realities is too great I shall deliberately take my glasses off and go wandering out into the street."[43]

Thurber never did remove those glasses deliberately. Perhaps his determination to overcome his handicap led him to even greater achievements. His eyes didn't rely on the usual outer focus; they were turned toward an inner-perception of the happy incidents and people he incorporated

---

[41]"Advice from a Blind Writer," Newsweek, LV (February 1, 1960), 49.

[42]James Thurber, Let Your Mind Alone (New York: 1937), pp. 244-245.

[43]Ibid., p. 245.

in his writing. James Thurber was strong enough to meet the major combats in his personal life with wit, wisdom, and the determined gaiety of the nightingale of old.

CHAPTER III

MAN AND THE LOWER SPECIES

When James Thurber wrote about animals, he assumed one of three roles: fabulist, pet-owner, or philosopher. As a fabulist he made a major contribution to the fable tradition in literature. As a pet-owner he gained the wide readership of others who found happy diversion in domesticated animals. As a philosopher he made several statements concerning the relationship of man to the lower species.

Thurber mixed the lightness of the nightingale with the wisdom of the owl when he wrote in earnest about man and beast. Thurber was as astute in judging animals as he was in observing man; after he decided what follies he wanted to exploit, he combined his knowledge of the species in a fascinating manner. He taught man by letting him laugh at himself; the animals took on the foolish ways of man and blundered uproariously. Man could chuckle at these animals; and, on second reading, he could see the serious moral Thurber had in mind.

Because Thurber felt animals were in many ways superior to men, he found they were the natural teachers of his lessons. He said he was tired of the capitalization of Man. He thought animals were far better adjusted

through their use of intuition than was man through his supposedly superior intelligence:

> For some curious reason Man has always assumed that he is the highest form of life in the universe. There is, of course, nothing with which to sustain this view. Man is simply the highest form of life on his own planet. His superiority rests on a thin and chancy basis: he has the trick of articulate speech and out of this, slowly and laboriously he has developed the capacity of abstract reasoning. Abstract reasoning, in itself, has not benefited Man so much as instinct has benefited lower animals.... In giving up instinct and going in for reasoning, Man has aspired higher than the attainment of natural goals.... The life to which he was naturally adapted he has put behind him; in moving into the alien and complicated sphere of Thought and Imagination he has become the least well-adjusted of all the creatures of the earth, and hence, the most bewildered.... Man ... is surely farther away from the Answer than any other animal this side of the ladybug."[1]

As a humorist and fabulist, Thurber expanded his philosophy of man and beast. He contributed to an old tradition of fable writing which dates back to the 5th Century, B.C., when a Greek named Aesop began creating these animal stories with moral meanings. Aesop emphasized his animal tale and subordinated his moral purpose.[2]

During Christ's lifetime and teaching, the fable took on a new dimension. Earlier the fable had used

---

[1]As quoted by Walter Blair, Native American Humor (San Francisco: 1960), pp. 179-180.

[2]Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "Fables," 1962.

animals to show the ways of man; now the ways of God were shown through the use of men in the parable. Both story forms were directed toward a moral lesson.

Until Medieval times there was little fable writing recorded. Then, in the 12th Century, Marie de France wrote many amusing beast tales, which were later imitated in the Owl and Nightingale debates. These poetic tales contrasted the birds in youth and age, gaiety and gravity, light-hearted and heavy-hearted approaches to life. During the same period, the delightful Bestiaries appeared; these tales emphasized the moral purpose rather than the story, thus differing from Aesop's fables appearing many centuries before.

One of the greatest English writers, Chaucer, made contributions to the fable tradition and to the trend of using animals in literature. Although his social allegory, The Parliament of Fowls, appeared earlier in his career, his masterpiece, The Canterbury Tales, contained the Nun's Priest's fable. Proud Chanticleer and his love, Pertelote, were barnyard fowl who showed human frailties such as pride and vanity.

Not until the 17th Century did the next great fabulist appear. La Fontaine, a Frenchman, used the fable form to expose the gilded greatness, foibles, and luxuries of his time. He recognized that the fable, or apologue,

contained two parts: the body or the story; and the soul, or its moral.[3]

Thurber, a Twentieth Century fabulist, was a strange mixture of the qualities of his ancestors. He was concerned with both the moral and the story; and like Chaucer, he could use animals skillfully and humorously to teach his lessons. The Thurber animals live as humans do--not in the barnyards, but in homes, bars, and social clubs. Like all the notable fabulists, Thurber had a keen perception of man and a delightful sense of humor. He reflected the images of his own times as did La Fontaine, three centuries earlier; sometimes he, like the Frenchman, took old stories and gave them new interpretations.

James Thurber's contribution to the fable tradition might be called the Thurber twist, a technique similarly used by O.Henry in many of his short stories. Thurber leads the reader to a logical conclusion; then he executes a trick turn, and concludes his story with a surprise ending which he reinforces with his moral.

For instance in his version of "Little Red Riding Hood," called "The Little Girl and the Wolf," Thurber shows the girl and the wolf meeting in the woods. They chat about the food in her basket; they separate and later they

---

[3]Ibid., p. 22.

meet again at the grandmother's house, where the wolf is in bed, frocked in the grandmother's garments. Just when the reader can be sure he knows the outcome of the story, Thurber writes, "Even in a nightcap a wolf does not look any more like your grandmother than the Metro Goldwyn lion looks like Calvin Coolidge. So the little girl took an automatic out of her basket and shot the wolf dead. Moral: It is not so easy to fool little girls nowadays as it used to be."[4] This modernized story includes among its other allusions, a Twentieth Century president, a symbol of motion pictures, and an automatic pistol.

Another example of this Thurber twist applied to an established story, concerns the brown hen who ran about the barnyard telling scoffing fowl the sky was falling. In the Thurber version the story ends with the sky actually coming down. On one level the reader finds a delightful approach to an old story. On second thought, he can see the plight of an individual in a crowd of non-believers who will not listen. In this fable, as in some of his other humor, Thurber is the nightingale on one apparent level, the owl on another deeper level of meaning.

Like Wordsworth, Thurber frequently takes the familiar and makes it strange. He transformed Tennyson's

---

[4]James Thurber, Fables for Our Time (New York: 1940), p. 5. For Thurber illustration, see Appendix, p. 116.

famous line into a moral for one of his fables: "It is better to have loafed and lost than never to have loafed at all."[5] Scott's The Lady of the Lake suggested a title for his fable "The Lady of the Legs," which portrays a vain female frog who takes great pride in her sleek legs. Her vanity leads to her downfall, for she succumbs to a wooing chef who also admires her legs -- in his cuisine.[6]

By using the palatable fable form, Thurber was able to show his readers their follies, rather than telling them their faults. Perhaps he best summed up his use of animals in fables in this way: "If you live as humans do, it will be the end of you."[7] A survey of Thurber's fables reveals the human vices he observed: false pride, conformity, hypocrisy, boastfulness, female domination, vanity, aimless behavior, greed, fanaticism and meaningless communication. By incorporating these vices in his fables, he also made a plea for their opposing virtues: humility, individualism, purposeful behavior, male domination, and intelligent communications.

Thurber's outstanding ability as a fabulist can be

---

[5] Ibid., p. 55.

[6] James Thurber, Further Fables for Our Time (New York: 1956), pp. 134-136.

[7] Thurber, Fables for Our Time (New York: 1956), pp. 134-136.

illustrated in his tale of the Owl and his followers. First, he carefully chooses the Owl, a bird of darkness and a cynical observer of men, to be his candidate for a leader. Then he likewise selects the creatures that promote the rise of their God. One dark night the Owl happens to say "Who" just as two little moles creep beneath his branch. The frightened moles make their first error; they assume the Owl saw them, and thus he must have a supernatural ability to see in the dark of the night. Then emotion takes the place of their reason, and the tiny moles hurry back to tell their tale to the gangling secretary bird. This doubting Thomas sets out to prove the moles' folly. The secretary bird asks the Owl questions which the Owl correctly answers with the words "To Wit" and "To Woo."

The secretary bird agrees; the Owl indeed is God. Thurber had conceived this plan for an accidental victory whereby the Owl rises to power. The seeds of assumption, emotionalism and conformity are sown, and the secretary bird, much taller and wiser than the moles, goes back to tell the kingdom. Those who do not conform to the belief that the Owl possesses supernatural powers and wisdom are thrust out of the land. Those remaining conformists, who comprise most of the kingdom, send a message to the Owl asking him to be their leader.

Now Thurber shows the Owl overstepping the bounds

of nature and legend. This wise observer of creatures, a nocturnal bird, yields, because of his pride and vanity. He consents to come down from his perch and rule the kingdom, night and day. In broad daylight the Owl goes to his "people" and his swaggering, glassy-eyed look gives him a great air of dignity. One of the followers screams, "He's God," and soon the others take up the cry.

Wherever the Owl goes, the animals follow him, with an unquestioning acceptance of his leadership. They even walk behind him down the middle of a busy highway. The reader knows, at this point, what can happen, but he counts this out as improbable. Then comes the Thurber twist: "They were still crying 'He's God!' when the truck hit them and ran them down. Some of the animals were merely injured, but most of them, including the Owl, were killed. Moral: You can fool too many of the people too much of the time."[8]

Thurber's carefully worded Moral with its universal implications, leads the reader to parallel the experiences of the Owl and his followers with situations in his own society. Thurber, the teacher, the wise Owl who did not overstep his bounds, has made his point with a dual tone of humor and gravity.

---

[8] Ibid., p. 36. See Appendix for picture of Owl, p. 116.

Thurber's ingenious twist to his fables is combined with his ability to use plays on words to achieve effective humor. In one tale there is a stepping-out stork whose smart wife soon catches on to the fact that he is not out delivering babies each night. Thurber has relied on a familiar story of storks delivering babies; and with a delightful play on words, he transforms the story into a sequence of events between Mr. and Mrs. Stork. Just when it appears that the husband is getting away with his nightly escapades, his wife catches on to his trick.

In another fable two beavers woo the same lassie. One beaver is the Eager beaver, another familiar attribute of this animal; his opposite is the playboy beaver. The maiden finally decides to marry the hard-worker, and they are married one day on his lunch hour. Instead of applauding the wisdom of the lady's choice and condemning the folly of the playboy, Thurber twists the story so that the female beaver is widowed by the overwork of her conscientious husband. The playboy beaver still has his fun, his bachelorhood, and his life.

Again Thurber's ability to rely on what is familiar to his reader and give it a new twist, is apparent in the tale of two tigers who have a rather stormy marriage. It isn't long before the wife becomes suspicious of her mate's meanderings. Instead of showing the separation or

divorce of the pair, Thurber has a unique way of letting the female keep her male at home. Knowing that some homes have tiger rugs, Thurber uses this knowledge in the fable and says the wife keeps him at home in front of the hearth, following his mysterious murder.

It is interesting to note that these two fables of the beavers and the tigers are like the many contained in his 1956 album which have a tone of pessimism and disaster. His earlier volume of fables, published in 1940, includes a much gayer approach to his animal lessons. During the last decade of his life, a darker view of life had crept into Thurber's writing.

The fable about the dinosaur and man was also included in the later collection. The tone is more depressing and cynical: Thurber, the nightingale, has become Thurber, the owl. Dinosaur and Man are having a discussion one day, and Man begins by saying," Greetings, Stupid.... Behold in me the artfully articulated architect of the future, the chosen species, the certain survivor, the indestructible one, the monarch of all you survey."[9] Man, possessing infinite wisdom and foresight, can see that he is the fitter of the two, for the dinosaur will someday

---

[9]Thurber, Further Fables for Our Time, pp. 65-66. For Thurber drawing, see Appendix, p. 117.

become extinct. "The dinosaur ... died not long after ... with a curious smile of satisfaction, or something of the sort, on their ephemeral faces."[10] Here again is the Thurber twist: Man's victory is somehow superficial.

Another fable in which man achieves a hollow victory over beast involves the lemming. This curious, tiny rodent, probably not used by earlier fabulists, gets into discussion with man. The relationship of these two is absurd and delightfully exaggerated; tiny rodent is pitted against powerful Man. Says one wise lemming, animal of instinct and intuition, to the scientist, product of intelligence and speech, "You cut down elm trees to put up institutions for people driven insane by the cutting down of elm trees."[11] The scientist banters with the beast and thinks he can surely prove his wisdom by pointing out the lemming's ridiculous habit of following his herd to a sea-death, drowning. The lemming replies, "How curious ... The one thing I don't understand is why you human beings don't."[12]

Thurber uses this intuitive sea death of lemmings to prove still another point about man. He tells of one lone

---

[10] Ibid., p. 69.

[11] James Thurber, My World and Welcome to It (New York: 1942), p. 83. See drawing of lemming in Appendix, p. 113.

[12] Ibid., p. 84.

lemming who stood back and watched the sea exodus of the other lemmings, who screamed as they ran, "We are saved." Then, through the eyes of the tiny, ugly lemming, man can see Thurber's moral, which takes on even more meaning for man: "All men should strive to learn before they die what they are running from, and to, and why."[13]

Thurber chose his animals as he chose the people he wrote about. Sometimes he mentioned the usual beasts such as the lion, tiger, fox or mouse, just as he wrote about his respected friends on the New Yorker magazine. Many times he wrote about real and imaginary creatures: the mongoose, bragdowdy, shrike or jackdaw. Instead of the common robin or sparrow, Thurber frequently chose the secretary bird, the penguin or the phoebe. When he wrote about people, he was concerned about unusual humans such as his maternal aunts or the many servants in his home. Thurber did not ridicule the inferior animals or humans; rather he used them as the teachers of Man. One might wonder what lesson "The Bat Who Got the Hell Out,"[14] could offer; but by trying to join the world of humans the disillusioned creature was soon content to return to his cave. Thurber could use the dowdy or the magnificent animals to

---

[13]Thurber, Further Fables for Our Time, p. 174.

[14]Ibid., p. 13. See drawings of Bat and other animals in Appendix, pp. 117-118.

help humans learn about themselves.

When Thurber assumed his role as a pet-owner, rather than a fabulist, he once again reflected the nightingale, light-hearted humor. When Thurber wrote of dogs, he magnified his warmth and perception. Perhaps this is why so many readers heralded his pieces about his pets: they shared his devotion to animals. He became so interested in animals that he conducted extensive research on the backgrounds of his favorite dogs. He wanted to know why the German Shepherd is such a good watch dog, why poodles love water, and why the Bloodhound is suited for detective work.

Thurber's interest in pets dated back to his boyhood home in Columbus, Ohio. The household always contained an animal member. When he wrote of Mugge, the Airedale who had the habit of biting Columbus residents, he couldn't resist exaggerating the story. He said that his family annually sent boxes of candy to all the persons Muggs had bitten, and one Christmas the list included forty names.[15]

When Thurber wrote of the next family pet, a bull terrier, he drew comparisons to humans. Rex had "one brindle eye that sometimes made him look like a clown and sometimes reminded you of a politician with a derby hat

---

[15]James Thurber, My Life and Hard Times (New York: 1933), pp. 77-86. See drawing of Muggs in Appendix, p. 118.

and cigar."[16] Thurber was proud of this dog who fared so well in neighborhood canine brawls, and he was amused by Rex's curious habit of bringing home large objects. One night, he records, the family found a chest of drawers which the dog had deposited on their steps.

Thurber's love of animals continued throughout his life, for in his adulthood he owned numerous poodles and Scottish terriers. He sensed the dog's ability to communicate without words; he admired the dog's unquestionable devotion to his master. When he wrote of his poodle, Christabel, he perceived,"She grins from ear to ear, her eyes twinkle, and she makes the unmistakable sound of laughter."[17] Years later, when Thurber's sight began to fail, he gained a new appreciation of the perceptive dog Christabel. "I had got so that I couldn't see her ... she gets up quietly when I enter a room where she is lying. Once when I stumbled into her and fell sprawling, she hurriedly examined me from head to foot, with a show of great anxiety."[18]

Thurber was concerned with the relationship of dog and master. He didn't like pet owners who made their

---

[16]James Thurber, Thurber's Dogs (New York: 1955), p. 69.

[17]Ibid., p. 228.

[18]Ibid., pp. 238-239.

animal friends into show pieces or paper fetchers. He believed that the domesticated animal was entitled to the same freedom man received; however, on some occasions the animal overstepped its bounds. With tongue-in-cheek Thurber said, "My home has been in charge of Christabel for a great many years now, and I never interfere with a woman's ruling a household."[19]

Thurber was interested in the domestication of animals and said it hadn't taken man more than a hundred centuries to discover that only the dog and cat were household pets. "One has but to spend a few days with an aardvark or a llama, command a water buffalo to sit up and beg, or try to housebreak a moose,"[20] to realize why not all animals are domestics.

The relationship of dog and Master was quite amusing to Thurber, for he felt the dog received questionable benefits:

> He has known the muzzle, the leash, and the tether; He has suffered the indignities of the show bench, the tin can on the tail, the ribbon in the hair;.... His digestion ruined by the macaroons and marshmallows of doting women.... But he has also had his fun, for he has been privileged to live with and study at close range, the only creature with reason, the most unreasonable of creatures.

---

[19] Ibid., p. 25.

[20] Ibid., p. 8.

> The dog has got more fun out of Man than Man has got out of the dog."[21]

Occasionally Thurber looked at the world through the eyes of his animals and interpreted what he saw. He realized that nature was strange and wonderful in the way she caused the mother dog to begin leaving her pups at about six weeks after their birth. On that one day, the mother instinctively seemed to say to her litter, "I have my own life to live, automobiles to chase, grocery boys' shoes to snap at, rabbits to pursue."[22] Then she would require the pups to begin their independent lives in the world.

Thurber had an uncanny perception of animals. As a pet-owner he could describe their habits and ways by using similes and metaphors. He could exaggerate their activities to prove his points; he would write about his pets with the same compassion he held for his human friends.

As a superb journalist, he could sense the human interest angle in national stories which occasionally involved animals. Two stories of national proportion especially interested Thurber; his records of the events transcend the mere newspaper coverage they were given.

---

[21] Ibid., p. 9. See Thurber cartoon in Appendix, p. 119.

[22] James Thurber, The Middle Aged Man on the Flying Trapeze (New York: 1935), p. 31.

In "Blaze in the Sky," he tells of a bull mastiff which was sent from England to Hollywood, as a gift for Fay Emerson, then Mrs. Elliot Roosevelt. It seems the dog received A-priority shipment papers; and in Blaze's coast to coast flight, he was given the seats of three sailors who were headed home on emergency leaves. The resulting national furor raised an issue which far exceeded the case of one dog and three sailors. "The public and the press had found something pretty special to kick around, and they kicked it around in that peculiar American way, which encompasses everything from elaborate gags to solemn senatorial investigation. Everybody picked up his phone, or got out his typewriter, or stood up and had his say."[23] One dog, three sailors, the First Family, tangled red tape which resulted in animal priority over man: Thurber saw in this situation a comical melodrama of human events.

Irony rang in the case of the killing of one of Albert Payson Terhune's dogs. Terhune was famous for his many collie stories which appeal to children. The newspapers quickly picked up the human interest story and unfurled an account of a family who visited the home of the author and accidentally struck and killed one of his

---

[23]Thurber, Thurber's Dogs, p. 175.

prize dogs, Sunnybank Jean. The gentle author of collie stories was in a rage, and he took the family to court to recover the capital losses which appeared much more important to him than the death of the dog. Thurber said the newspapers had missed the most important figure in the story, the boy who had persuaded the family to go visit the home of his author-idol. Terhune "was by way of being an idol of Arthur's, which is to say a god, for Arthur was fourteen."[24] After the accident, Thurber said, "Arthur Ellis, collie-lover, Terhune-worshipper, abruptly brought face to face with two of his cherished idols, one dead by his father's car, the other demoniacal with rage against all Ellises. Probably nobody paid much attention to the little boy."[25] This incident was one of the few in which Thurber wrote about children; it was one of the many which concerned animals.

When Thurber made statements concerning the relationship of Man to the lower species, he became a philosopher. He said of Man, "He will not get anywhere until he realizes, in all humility, that he is just another of God's creatures, less kindly than Dog, possessed of less dignity than Swan, and incapable of becoming as magnificent

---

[24] Ibid., p. 127.

[25] Ibid., p. 130.

an angel as Black Panther.... I have grown a little tired of the capitalization of Man, his easy assumption of a dignity more apparent than real, and his faith in a high destiny for which he is not fitted by his long and bloody history. The most frightening study of mankind is Man."[26]

Thurber saw that Man has misused his reason and speech, and he claimed his superiority on these very attributes which have caused his downfall. Animals continue through the centuries to lead adjusted lives, guided by instinct, while man gets further and further away from a natural way of life. Thurber comically suggested it was time Man started accepting the responsibility for his own pitfalls instead of blaming them on animals: "pigeon-toed" should be replaced by "people-toed!" He found it ironical that humans don't like to be called animals, yet their clubs have names such as Elks, Moose, Eagles, and Lions.[27]

With a cynicism approaching bitterness, Thurber, the thoughtful owl, exaggerates man's weakness by saying that there will be a day when the dolphins, rodents, or insects will take over the world and do a better job with it than Man has done. "It neither alarms nor surprises me that

---

[26]Harvey Breit, "Mr. Thurber Observes a Serene Birthday," New York Times (December 4, 1949), p. 17

[27]James Thurber, Lanterns and Lances (New York: 1960), pp. 69-74.

Nature, whose patience with our self-destructive species is giving out, may have decided to make us, if not extinct, at least a secondary power among the mammals of this improbable planet."[28] Thurber makes his point by an improbable statement; the seriousness of his tone suggests his concern with man's follies. "I am afraid that nothing I can say will prevent mankind from being unkind to catkind, dogkind, and bugkind."[29]

In his short stories Thurber occasionally likens man to animals. The main characters of "The Catbird Seat" are Mr. Martin and Mrs. Barrows. The martin is a small, drab bird; Mr. Martin is an insignificant bachelor, an accountant with a patterned life. The barrow is an ugly, castrated male pig; the unfeminine Mrs. Barrows earned her name, for she was anything but alluring to Mr. Martin. The story's plot revolves about Mr. Martin's attempt to exterminate Mrs. Barrows, the seemingly impossible task of bird over barrow.

Thurber's work also exhibits many qualities of naturalism. He frequently compares man and animal; his later works reflect melancholy and pessimism; sometimes his characters live in an amoral universe; he thought all

---

[28] Ibid., p. 149

[29] Ibid., p. 209.

creatures were puppets of Fate. Thurber liked to put Man and animal on the same level, then draw a new comparison of the worth of each species. He tried to find the qualities which were inherent in all creatures. Frequently he used animals in his titles, such as The Beast In Me and Other Animals, a collection of his short stories and essays. He named his one play, about a midwestern college English professor, The Male Animal. In his attempts to make man see how hypocritical he is in his feeling of superiority, he drew his points to the extremes; he emphasized and exaggerated by occasionally allowing man to be inferior to beast. The male animal would have known instinctively how to take care of the other male who tried to steal his mate: Professor Tommy Turner was afraid at first to follow his instinct and tried to solve his problems by intelligence.

Perhaps Thurber suggests that those qualities which man does have in common with animal are the suppressed traits which might lead him back to a more adjusted way of life. Certainly Thurber would not suggest a return to primitivism, but he could see the dangers in his overly organized, psychology-oriented times.

Thurber had a great reverence for Nature's creations; even the most insignificant and unattractive animal was not without merit, and sometimes that very animal could

be used by Thurber in his fables. But Man imposed a false hierarchy of beings; he accepted false reasons for his supremacy. Thurber felt Nature should not be used to the advantage of Man, just because he possessed the questionable intelligence to construct theories, laws, and concepts. Thurber had a deep insight into the ways of nature: "The kangaroo, it has always seemed to me, is Exhibit A among the evidence supporting the contention of some of us that Nature has a grotesque and lovely sense of humor."[30]

James Thurber -- fabulist, pet-owner, and philosopher -- possessed a superb knowledge of the ways of animals and the ways of men. He could use animals to teach and to entertain. When the animals became the teachers of his fables, the reader could laugh at the silly ways of beasts yet realize the underlying truth about the ways of man. When the animals were objects of entertainment, the reader could enjoy their antics with Thurber. When Thurber spoke philosophically about the nature of man and animals and their relationship to one another, he used a pointed pen or sword. He would exaggerate, humiliate, embarrass, and degrade, to prove his points about the hypocrisy of man.

---

[30]James Thurber, "A Party of One," Holiday, XXVIII (December, 1960), 11.

Just as James Thurber could assume the nightingale approach to his family, his friends, and his pets, he sometimes had to accept the unpleasant task of judging man as the cynical owl who debated with the nightingale, many centuries earlier. In Thurber's mind and writing, Man was sometimes the lower species who deserved to be treated much less kindly than one of Thurber's own pets.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF THE SEXES

James Thurber said his greatest mortal enemy was the American woman,[1] and the pages of his writings are the battlefields of his attacks against her. He was the defender of the male and the critic of the female in the ageless battle of the sexes.

As Thurber moved farther away from his personal world, he became more and more like the wise owl. His attacks on woman were vigorous and strategic; they were the results of careful thought mingled with pointed humor. He saw the dominant woman all around him; woman had "slipped (or jumped) from the pedestal on which the male had placed her. She has taken her seat alongside Man on the bar stool and in the Forum."[2]

Because of the aggressive nature of the Twentieth Century woman, she could no longer be classified as part of Mankind. There was Mankind and there was Womankind, and they could never be anything but opponents, according to Thurber.

---

[1]Max Eastman, The Enjoyment of Laughter (New York: 1936), p. 105.

[2]James Thurber and E. B. White, Is Sex Necessary? (New York: 1929), p. xvii. See Thurber cartoon, Appendix, p. 120.

Thurber's typical woman is an overbearing, homely, "fiercely aggressive female with the figure of a potato sack, a face which is a cross between a weasel's and a swordfish's and, the final indignity, perfectly straight and stringy hair ... She frowns grimly, smiles idiotically and leers loonily. She stalks male, rules him, and even once, murders him."[3]

This Thurber woman is a confident operator who drags her man to such events as bridge parties and teas. She has entered every field man once ruled, even the embalming game, "standing ready to commit us to the earth."[4] Thurber said she dominates and she seems to be victorious in her bouts with man, but her victory is hollow. The more she tries to excel in male fields, the more of her femininity and dignity she loses. Thurber didn't try to soften his blow to woman; his attacks were pointed and direct. Ironically, Thurber maintained he had been misunderstood in his approach toward woman. "The only catty letters I get are <u>from men</u>. They come from different men, but they all sound like the same man. Catty and a little nasty ... The only anonymous letters I get are <u>from men</u>. The only interesting

---

[3]"That Thurber Woman," <u>Newsweek</u>, XXII (November 22, 1934), 34. See Appendix for Thurber cartoon, p. 121.

[4]Peter DeVries, "James Thurber: The Comic Prufrock," <u>Poetry</u>, LXIII (December, 1943), 155.

letters I get are from women. The only reason I draw women as savage is that they've failed to come up to the level I think they can reach."[5]

If Thurber actually did think woman was capable of higher achievements, he did not give her positive suggestions for her improvement. Instead, he gave her many examples of overbearing women who ruined the lives of the males around them. The woman could draw her conclusions from Thurber's scenes; the man would be warned of her possessive, aggressive ways.

Although Thurber professed a mission to raise woman to a higher level, he still said he hated her as she was. "I hate women because they always know where things are ... even things that are of no importance at all, such as, say, snapshots her husband took three years ago at Elbow Beach."[6] He hated her because she degraded the English language with her contributions of "all-righty," and "Yes indeedy." He hated her because she never has the exact change when she gets on a bus; she has a cold way of sizing up another woman when she enters the room. "While they never lose old snapshots or anything of that sort, they invariably lose one glove ... If there were no other reason

---

[5]"Thurber..An Old Hand at Humor," Life, XLVIII (March 14, 1960), 17.

[6]James Thurber, Let Your Mind Alone (New York: 1937), p. 95.

in the world for hating women, that one would be enough."[7]

Thurber despised woman's habit of making broad generalizations. He hated woman for making man more organized and domesticated. He hated woman because her supremacy had even reached the contention of one lady who claimed that God was a Woman. "She doesn't like people who deride or degrade the human species,"[8] said the woman of God. Man wouldn't even have his freedom in Heaven.

With the same cynicism Thurber uses in prophesying the time when animals would rule over man, he says that the only hope of survival for man, is woman. "Man's day is indeed done; the epoch of Woman is upon us."[9] "If the Curtain is one day coming down, well, Thurber's own prediction that they will outlast men only bears out once more the fact that men, more sensitive organisms, are pioneers in everything, even decline."[10] Thurber says the weak male can and will survive due to the efforts of the female; what he says and what he means may be two different things.

His interesting attack on the American female, who

---

[7] Ibid., p. 99.

[8] James Thurber, Credos and Curios (New York: 1962), p. 51.

[9] Thurber, Let Your Mind Alone, p. 232.

[10] Peter DeVries, p. 159.

was so different from the women of his youth, leads the reader to several conclusions. Perhaps Thurber thinks that by exposing and exaggerating the ways of woman, he can bring her to her senses. Perhaps he hopes that men will become so alarmed they will help put woman off the bar stools and back into the homes. Perhaps he thinks the American woman is a rich source of entertainment to augment his humorous writing. Whatever his reasons, Thurber assumes the role of an authority on women, a defender of men, and a strategist in the battle of the sexes.

With E. B. White, Thurber wrote the delightful satire Is Sex Necessary? (1929), a parody on modern sex manuals of the day. In one of Thurber's chapters, he took upon himself the responsibility of classifying the American females, as a guide for male suitors.

He said the "Quiet Type" is a menace to all men. The "Buttonhole Twister Type" is demonstrative in affections, forward, and "likely to be restless and discontented with the married state."[11] The "Don't Dear Type" has the power to allure and repulse at the same time; she is most commonly found in the Middlewest, particularly in university towns. The "I-Can't-go-through-with-it Type" is likely to discuss sex on her first meeting with

---

[11]Thurber and White, pp. 88-89.

a man. She is a product of the post-war years.

Thurber's women were classified, dissected, dehumanized, and criticized. When these women he typed in Is Sex Necessary? became wives, they were even more under his satirical eye. A wife should "strive at all times to give her husband at least the illusion that he is free to come and go,"[12] said Thurber. Such a statement acknowledges the dominance of the wife and the lack of freedom of the husband. Even though Thurber paid wives such compliments as calling them "tapioca brains,"[13] he said they did have their merit. Each wife is "indispensable in getting the tickets and reservations, packing and unpacking, mixing Bromo-Seltzers, fending off beautiful ladies.... Here is the only sex that can successfully close a wardrobe trunk."[14] What lady would not be overcome by such a compliment?

Most of Thurber's males seemed so helpless and subjugated that they needed a James Thurber to speak out in their behalf. The women were big, overbearing and lumpish; the males were little, insignificant and undernourished-looking. Thurber's men fall in three general categories:

---

[12] Ibid., p. 16.

[13] Thurber, Thurber Country (New York: 1953), p. 217.

[14] Ibid., p. 260.

"No. 1 is the fat, gross fellow at whom the wife screams in desperation: 'Why did I ever marry below my emotional level?' No. 2 is the little man with glasses and mustache who can bark back at his wife: 'Well, who made the magic go out of our marriage -- you or me?' No. 3 is the sad, droopy guy who protests mildly as the leering female carries him to the couch: 'You're going a bit far, Miss Blanchard.'"[15] These men are captives of their wives, their own inadequacies, and time. They are bothered by suburban ceremonials, by disciplines beginning with 'psych' and by broken-communications between man and man or man and woman.[16] Many of them are as bewildered by machines as they are by women. Mr. Munroe, for example, was "reduced to jelly by a bat in his bedroom, paralyzed by the middle-class problem of directing the workmen who come to move the furniture."[17]

Usually, as husbands, these men could escape their wives only in their dreams. Walter Mitty could achieve the roles of authority, responsibility and heroism not possible in a real world where his wife sent him after overshoes and puppy biscuits. In the freedom of his dreams he became a

---

[15]"That Thurber Woman," p. 84.

[16]Robert Elias, "James Thurber: The Primitive, the Innocent, the Individual," American Scholar, XXVII (Summer, 1958), 355.

[17]Norris Yates, The American Humorist (Ames: 1964), p. 281.

surgeon, a commander, the star-witness in a murder trial.[18]

The subjugated husband is common in many of Thurber's short stories. Mr. Pendley is so over run and unmechanical that he isn't even allowed to select his new car. "His wife and Mr. Huse, the salesman, ignore him and get into an intricate talk about grinding valves, relining brakes, putting in a new battery."[19]

Mr. Bidwell has a pushy wife who won't even let her husband be in solitude in his thoughts. From Mr. Bidwell comes the common cry of all such husbands: "Why don't you let me alone?"[20]

Occasionally Thurber portrays a husband who achieves some sort of victory over his wife. Mr. Preble chooses murder as the way of gaining his freedom to marry his secretary. He tells his wife he will have to kill her to accomplish his goal. Ironically, the wife consents to her execution, and she allows her husband to put her in the coal bin, supposed site of the murder. Although the husband appears victorious in his plan, the wife has the last degrading word: 'Shut the door behind you!' she screamed after him. 'Where were you born -- in a barn?'"[21]

---

[18]James Thurber, Thurber Carnival (New York: 1945), pp. 47-51. See Thurber cartoon, Appendix, p. 121.

[19]James Thurber, The Middle Aged Man on the Flying Trapeze (New York: 1935), p. 58.

[20]Ibid., p. 73.

[21]Ibid., p. 86

Henry Bentley's great moment of triumph comes late one night when he finds a way to compensate for an unbearable situation. Henry was not even allowed to help name his daughter; otherwise she never would have been a Cora of family tradition and of James Fenimore Cooper fame. That late night of his victory, Henry Bentley raises his voice and gives a shrieking war whoop. At last he can express his frustrations with his beaten-down married state.[22]

Tommy Trinway is another husband who achieves his own kind of victory. Tommy's wife selects a car for him; he doesn't want to drive it, but to please her, he does. One day, while on vacation, he somehow wrecks the wife-selected vehicle. Later that day when he and his wife check into a hotel, Tommy asks for two single rooms instead of one. "Tommy signs the register and then walks jauntily out of the revolving doors into the street, whistling."[23] Somehow Tommy feels he has had a chance to get even with his wife.

Professor Tommy Turner, in the play The Male Animal, is somewhat unlike the other Thurber protagonists in that he emerges victorious by the end of the plot. Tommy is a

---

[22] Ibid., p. 68.

[23] Ibid., p. 200.

pleasant, intellectual, unathletic English professor in a midwestern college. His life goes along quite smoothly until two things happen: he decides to read a controversial letter on the Sacco-Vanzetti Case to his classes, and an ex-suitor of his wife's stirs up the old romance. Tommy is thus faced at once with the loss of a wife and a job. As the plot unfolds, Tommy, like all male animals, instinctively decides to fight for his mate, even though his opponent is a brawny ex-football player. Tommy loses the fight but wins back his wife. At the close of the play he has also decided to read the letter, an excellent piece of literature, to his classes, regardless of the consequences. So Tommy is one male who fought and won; he actually seemed to raise his level in comparison to his wife.

Mr. Martin, protagonist of "The Catbird Seat," also achieves one of the few male victories over the female. He carefully plans the rubbing out of the menace of his life, an irritating office-worker, Mrs. Ulgine Barrows. She is as unattractive as her name: "She romped ... like a circus horse, she was constantly shouting those silly questions at him."[24]

Mousy Mr. Martin carefully plots her extermination.

---

[24]Thurber, Thurber Carnival, p. 10.

He weaves his scheme into his precise time-schedule life. He sees himself as a daring, bold man. "It was his idea to puff a few puffs on a Camel (after the rubbing out), snuff it out in the ashtray holding her lipstick-stained kuckies...."[25]

Mr. Martin follows his plan carefully, but there is no act of physical violence. Either he lost his courage in her apartment, or his original plan did not include a "rubbing out" by murder. Nevertheless, he leaves her apartment after sticking out his tongue at the menace of his life. When Mrs. Barrows told the wild tale of Martin's visit to her apartment, she is not only thought a liar; she is fired. "'If you weren't such a drab, ordinary little man,' she said, 'I'd think you'd planned it all. Sticking your tongue out, saying you were sitting in the catbird seat, because you thought no one would believe me when I told it! My God, it's really too perfect.'"[26] Mr. Martin thus achieved his victory and his peace of mind by either an accidental or planned approach to his problem.

The couple in "The Unicorn in the Garden," have their roles reversed at the close of the fable. Thurber shows a male who achieves a partially accidental victory

---

[25] Ibid., p. 12.

[26] Ibid., p. 16.

over his wife. One morning the husband wakes his wife, excitedly, to tell her there is a unicorn in the garden. The sleepy, disbelieving wife, tells him the unicorn is a mythical beast, and that he is out of his mind. When he wakes her again to tell her of the unicorn's activities in the garden, she becomes alarmed. When he goes back in the garden, she calls the police. When they arrive, the husband is fast asleep in the garden and the wife has to tell the story. The police and psychiatric institute employees become convinced it is she who is crazy. Their suspicions are further validated when the husband denies having told his wife of a unicorn. So they put the wife in a straight jacket and haul her away.[27] The husband in this tale was in the right place at the right time, asleep in the garden. Upon awaking and seeing what has transpired, he realizes his vantage point and refutes his own story. By lying, he emerges victorious; his wife is gone and his freedom returned.

The Thurber male is most frequently a victim of his wife's tyrannical rule. Sometimes he achieves a limited victory over his mate; other times his victory is accidental, as in the case of the "Unicorn in the Garden." Less frequently the male escapes in death. In

---

[27]James Thurber, Fables for Our Times (New York: 1942), pp. 65-66. See cartoon of unicorn, Appendix, p. 121.

"The Whip-Poor-Will" the main character is driven to his fate by the bird outside his window and the wife in his house. "The mechanism of her mind was as simple as a cigarette box; it was either open or it was closed, and there was nothing else, nothing else, nothing else.... "[28]

On the other hand, the Thurber woman is usually dominant, aggressive, unattractive, obnoxious, unfeminine or overly organized. She is the ruler of her house and her man. She seems sexless and unappealing; she is extremely married and unromantic. The only likeable Thurber women are some of those in his own personal life: his mother, his aunts, Columbus townspeople, and his second wife, Helen. The Thurber woman of his short stories is not a tribute to an American woman. She, like many Thurber creations, is exaggerated and stereotyped to make his attacks more forceful. Thurber, "premier male strategist of our generation,"[29] might also be dubbed the premier critic of the female.

Thurber once wrote an essay of advice for "beaten down married couples," which he said was "the result of fifty years (I began as a little boy) spent in studying

---

[28]Thurber, My World and Welcome to It (New York: 1942), p. 26.

[29]Charles Brady, "What Thurber Saw," Commonweal, LXXV (December 8, 1961), 275.

the nature and behavior, mistakes and misunderstandings, of the American Male (Homo Americanis) and his mate."[30] He advises that a husband refrain from running down former beaux of his wife, and that he make a serious attempt to learn the names of all his mate's friends. He says a man shouldn't insult his wife in public; but with a typical Thurber twist, he advises the husband to insult her in private. A wife, on the other hand, should furnish her husband with a detailed map of the house; she should take time to promote understanding of household mysteries, such as the guest towel.

It is evident that Thurber thoroughly enjoyed writing about the relationship of men and women, especially wives and husbands. Enjoyment was one of the ingredients he felt a humorous writer must possess, and there is no doubt that Thurber took pleasure in his battles. Although he didn't claim to be an authority on sex, love, or marriage, he did make his points in a humorous, satirical manner which other married couples and empathetic readers could appreciate. E. B. White said Thurber "was at once amused and frightened by its manifestations among his friends, many of them married ... That he was afraid is obvious from the drawings in the book, the bent or stooped postures of the males

---

[30]Thurber, Thurber Country, p. 42.

contrasting strongly with the erect and happy stance of the females ... Above the still cool lake of marriage he saw rising the thin white mist of Man's disparity with Women."[31]

Thurber and White's book with the alluring title, Is Sex Necessary?, doesn't pretend to answer the question it poses. Readers who seek a physiological, medical, erotic approach to sex will not find it in Thurber and White's book -- except in the delightful way the book mocks the current sex manuals of the late 1920's. "The heavy writers had gotten sex down and were breaking its arm. We were determined that sex should retain its high spirits. So we decided to spoof the medical books."[32]

Their spoof consists of eight chapters of supposed research, case analyses, love definitions, statistics, and records of historical developments in the fields of love, sex, and marriage. Their tone is mockingly serious: "Sex is by no means everything. It varies, as a matter of fact, from only as high as 78 per cent of everything to as low as 3.10 per cent. The norm, in a sane, healthy person, should be between 18 and 24 per cent."[33] With the same feigned

---

[31]Walter Blair, Horse Sense in American Humor (New York: 1962), p. 286.

[32]Thurber and White, p. xii.

[33]Ibid., p. 140.

authoritative approach, the authors classify males and females, trace the rise of pedestalism in America, warn housewives of the psychological disturbances of males, and define numerous terms to supplement their research. Neurosis, for example, is "the beginning of the end, unless the husband can go away somewhere."[34]

Thurber wrote the odd-numbered chapters and the second section of Chapter VIII. In one of his essays, he explains how the woman has come to be put on a pedestal and worshipped. She was so mysterious to herself that men began to think she must indeed be miraculous. In order to retain her high position, she had to devise numerous ways to convince the male that she was unapproachable. Thurber seriously notes that fudgemaking was woman's first Diversion Subterfuge to retain her status. When the fudge-making failed with the persistent male, she invented reams of parlor games. "The American male's repugnance to charades, which is equaled, perhaps, by his repugnance to nothing else at all, goes back to those years."[35] When the male found his attempts in vain, he had to sublimate his desires. He retreated to the den and began one of numerous trivial hobbies such as raising begonias. If this didn't relieve his frustration, neurosis sometimes set in.

---

[34] Ibid., p. 186.

[35] Ibid., p. 43. For Thurber cartoons illustrated in Is Sex Necessary?, see Appendix, pp. 122-123.

The tone of Is Sex Necessary? is somewhat similar to Thurber's tone in most of his other writings about the American male and female. He assumes a position above his characters and looks down on their situations. He shows how impossible marriage can be for the male; to some readers he shows how unfortunate the woman is in having such a weak husband. Beneath his criticism of the female he may be pointing up the weaknesses of the male, hoping he will rise to roles of authority and dominance.

Thurber was amused with the overemphasis on sex in the 1920's, but his strategy in showing that concern was discreet, original and highly amusing. He could see that sex and love had gone for centuries without the concern and analyses they were now receiving. "For the past 10 million years Nature has been busily inventing ways to make the male attractive to the female, but the whole business of courtship, from the marine annelids up to man, still lumbers heavily along, like a complicated musical comedy."[36] In spite of the attention Freud was receiving in the country at the time, Thurber said, "I have not always, I am sorry to say, been able to go the whole way with the Freudians, or even a considerable distance."[37]

---

[36]Thurber, My World and Welcome to It, p. 9.

[37]Thurber, Let Your Mind Alone, p. 58.

However, his ideas about sex and personality were not necessarily in conflict with those of Freud: he certainly agreed that the male animal is unduly repressed by his environment.[38]

Many years after Is Sex Necessary? appeared, Thurber made a direct statement about the state of love in the United States. "Americans are brought up without being able to tell love from sex, lust, Snow White or Ever After. We think it is a pushbutton solution or Instant-Care for discontent and a sure road to happiness, whatever it is. By our sentimental ignorance we encourage marriage as a kind of tranquilizer drug. A lady of 47 who has been married 27 years and has 6 children knows what love really is and once described it to me like this: 'Love is what you've been through with somebody.'"[39] The reader of Thurber's short stories must certainly agree that the couples have gone through a lot with one another, but the result is seldom love or affection. Thurber's couples may have married as the result of the Snow White or Ever After dream. Thurber shows their situations after the romance has worn off the marriage. Certainly it is hard to imagine the honeymoon love of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Mitty, or the Munroes, Pendleys, or Prebles. Their Ever Afters are a

---

[38]Yates, p. 288.

[39]"Thurber .. An Old Hand at Humor," p. 108.

long series of the marriage scenes Thurber satirically portrays.

Thurber, of course, wrote very little about his own married life. There is no clear indication that his first marriage was unhappy enough to cause his attitudes shown in his writings. The few comments he made on his second marriage indicate that the Thurbers were quite happy. Interestingly enough, he never wrote of his family life, although he did have a daughter. He mentioned more about his grandchildren than he did of his own child when she was growing up.

Thurber, the Owl, made his direct attacks on the American woman, and occasionally the American man. The bird of "The Owl and the Nightingale" might well have spoken for the American woman:

> Oft am I angered by thy blame,
> Thou speakest to my hurt and shame.[40]

And as the owl of old answered the gay nightingale, Thurber might have replied:

> My voice is bold and not forlorn,
> It soundeth like a mighty horn:[41]

and again later:

> I do men good thus with my throat
> And help them with my warning note:[42]

---

[40] John Manley, English Prose and Poetry (New York: no date), p. 151.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., p. 16.

If the word men is accepted by Thurber's interpretation when he made a distinction between Mankind and Womankind, perhaps his voice indeed might help men with his warning notes concerning the American women.[43]

---

[43]For further cartoons illustrating the war between the sexes, see Appendix, pp. 123-127.

CHAPTER V

MAN VERSUS THE MAN-MADE

Thurber's nightingale soul turned to a heavy-hearted humor as he wandered from tales of his personal life into the realms of social criticism. When he tried to reason why "The trouble with Man is Man,"[1] he put a double edge on his laughter: on one side the reader could enjoy his witty, exaggerated writing; on the other side was a cutting surface of a much more painful, pessimistic, blunt humor. Now Thurber, observer of Man, the owl in the thickets, was impatiently dedicated to his own hopes that his humor might do some good for man.

The golden days of his youth had passed; middle age brought Thurber further away from his dreams and closer to the realism of the individual's plight in modern civilization. World War I had made a great change in the relationship of Man and his society; suddenly he had to worry about his own safety in an American society which was so soothingly secure in the 19th Century. Thurber sensed the uneasiness of his times, and he saw the increasing bounds placed on the individual by his own inventions: theories, systems, psychological principles, push-buttons,

---

[1]James Thurber, Lanterns and Lances (New York: 1955), p. 204.

self-services, and mechanical monsters. The humorist, who in 1942 wrote a fable about "The Owl Who Was God," decided in 1960 to write a novel called The Nightingheul, "about the people in a typical town called Americanapolis and their reaction to a mechanical monster who pecks away at the cornices of their public buildings."[2] The nightingale Thurber wrote about the owl in the '40's; the owl Thurber talked of writing about grotesque nightingales two decades later.

The main ailments of his society were dehumanization, statistics, mangled communications, formless literature, art and speech, specialization, conformity, hypocrisy, confinements opposing individual freedom, and a culture which was oral and child-centered. Thurber's treatment of these conditions was two-fold: he directly stated what he felt was wrong, and he showed characters in his short stories suffering from these modern "diseases." By sprinkling laughter on his writings, he made his lessons much more digestible. Thurber, a teacher, defender of freedom, crusader for the individual in a modern society enslaved by his own inventions, was also a prophet. "Man is flying too fast for a world that is round.... Soon he will catch

---

[2]"Thurber .. An Old Hand at Humor," Life, XLVIII (March 14, 1960), 103.

up with himself, in a great rear-end collision, and Man will never know that what hit Man from behind was Man."[3]

As Thurber struggled to adjust, in his own way, to an increasingly complex world, he became more and more disgusted with the how-to-do-it experts who imposed their ideas on the public. In 1937 he published Let Your Mind Alone, a collection of essays, many of which were directed against the adjustment-specialists. His plea was simple: let all of our minds alone. By invading the privacy of the soul, the psychiatrists and analysts had taken away man's last sanctum -- his own mind, dreams, memories. Thurber's criticism of "writers of books on how to control your nerves, how to conquer fear, how to cultivate calm, how to be happy in spite of everything,"[4] was direct and forceful. He was tired of being analyzed, categorized, organized, and advised by unhappy happiness-experts and living-supervisors. "A person might build up a streamlined mind, a mind awakened to a new life, a new discipline, only to have the whole works shot to pieces by so minor and unpredictable a thing as a wrong telephone number."[5]

---

[3]James Thurber, Further Fables for Our Time (New York: 1956), p. 169.

[4]James Thurber, Let Your Mind Alone (New York: 1937), p. 57.

[5]Ibid., p. 18.

One of Thurber's greatest enemies was the mind expert: the psychiatrist, psychoanalyst or psychologist. In the wonderlands of psyche he found a realm of new terms, theories and suppositions. Phobias, for example, were merely labels for the fears man had always had, but had never before concerned himself with. "Now he is afraid of the very fear he had of being afraid and hence is a victim of what I can only call phobophobophobia, and is in even deeper than he was before."[6] Thurber didn't want to worry about what his subconscious was doing while his thoughts meandered away from his conscious nature. "The unconscious mind often opposes what the conscious mind wants to do or say, and frequently trips it up with all kinds of evasions, deceits, gags, and kicks in the pants. Our popular psychiatrists try to make these mysteries clear to the layman by the use of simple, homely language, and I am trying to do the same."[7] In his own delightful way, Thurber tried to explain how to understand the how-to-do-and-think-it men. He decided "You can't teach an old egoist new persons,"[8] in this modern age of

---

[6] Ibid., p. 74.

[7] Ibid., p. 49. For Thurber cartoon concerning man and psychiatry, see Appendix, pp. 128-130.

[8] Ibid., p. 29.

the four A's: "anxiety, apprehension, agonizing, and aspirin."[9]

Thurber was concerned about the new emphasis on inner-man; he watched people get involved in self-analysis which resulted in frustration and bewilderment. The main characters in his short stories were bothered by their author's own problems. Sometimes they were

> ... perplexed by cars that will not start, driven to divorce by women who will not let them read their paper, or reduced to the data of equations by social and psychological engineers who explain away volition; but consistently they are engaged in self-preservation -- struggling to keep inviolate in the realms of chance, individuality, reflection and purpose, which gives a well substance to work with and freedom of occasion for exercise. The self, as Thurber shows, is in danger of extinction when persons are driven inward until society becomes impossible, or forced outward until there is no residue to socialize. The most interesting aspect of Thurber's artistic development is in terms of his search for a place where the individual can finally reside -- or preside.[10]

The more man pondered the terms now applied to his mind, the more confused he became. Many times Thurber characters tried to talk over their problems with a friend, or they resorted to drinking which became neither excessive nor effective. Many of Thurber's later stories

---

[9]Thurber, Lanterns and Lances, p. 167.

[10]Robert Elias, "James Thurber: The Primitive, the Innocent, the Individual," American Scholar, XXVII (Summer, 1958), 356. See illustration in Appendix, p. 131.

take place in the setting of a cocktail party, where neither drink nor discussion leaves them anything but sober about their crippled psyches. For example, George Merry, English literature instructor, and Dr. Morton Prell, involved themselves in a discussion about dream analysis and sexual symbolism. Dr. Prell became so engrossed in his analysis of his friend that George had to warn him: "Oh, Prell, you were about to light your spectacles again. Your cigar is in the ashtray." Prell coldly thanked his guest and replied, "Your delusion that I am forever about to light my glasses is based on an unconscious wish-fulfillment. You are afraid that I am going to see too clearly into the latency of your dream work."[11] Even at a cocktail party, the smallest remark could be transfigured into a psychological tendency. Man had become quite involved in thinking about thinking, in concentrating on concentration and in exploring his subconscious.

However, the mind which was invaded for inspection and introspection was also a sanctum for some of the Thurber characters who retreated to dream environments in their attempts to escape reality. For example, Walter Mitty could be strong, brave, noble, and ever so necessary

---

[11] James Thurber, "The Danger in the House," Harpers, CCXXV (September, 1962), 43. See Appendix for Thurber cartoons, pp. 130-131.

in his dream worlds. In reality he was weak, downtrodden, and subjected to his wife and mechanisms, such as his car. Mr. Martin, protagonist of "The Catbird Seat," looked inward and saw himself as an executor of fate, a pillar of strength, and a concocter of brave schemes. When others looked at Mr. Martin, they saw a mousy accountant who led a drab, patterned life. Even the creator of these characters had a dual view of reality revealed in his humor: that of the nightingale, and that of the owl. Thurber believed "no man is wise except in his own foolish daydreams."[12]

Among the other targets on Thurber's dartboard of life were the specialists in every field. He jabbed fun at medical language by inventing his own diseases, such as coreopsis, and obstrecsis of the ductal tract. These official-sounding diagnoses were actually combinations of root words which Thurber and his readers vaguely recognized. Obst. would be similar to obstetrics, or the practice of assisting women during pregnancy and childbirth. Osis means multiple. Obstrecsis of the ductal tract was an interesting disease for a male patient of Walter Mitty, a surgeon in his dreams. "Medical science has done much for humanity, but not in the area of verbal communication. It

---

[12]Walter Blair, Horse Sense in American Humor (New York: 1962), p. 290.

should undergo a prefectomy, and have some of its prefixes taken out,"[13] diagnosed the non-medical humorist.

Thurber decided that one of the great problems of Twentieth Century living was that "we are divided into literally hundreds of Area Men, none of whom knows or cares very much about men in other categories of endeavor or thought. But we mumble along in our multiple confusion. Every man is not an island unto himself, interested in, even obsessed by, his own preoccupation."[14]

In "The Last Clock," a delightfully satirical "Fable for the Time, Such as It Is, of Men," he presented a panorama of difficulties caused by the Area Men. The story concerned an ogre who habitually ate clocks, until he had consumed all but one remaining timepiece in the town. When the clockman could not solve the ogre's and the entire town's problem, he called in consultants to help him. A General Practitioner, physician, was summoned, but in these modern times he treated only Generals, so he could offer nothing. "The doctor wore a black beard, carried a black bag, and gave the ogre a black look. 'This case is clearly not in my area,' he said."[15] Next a

---

[13]James Thurber, "The Psychosemanticist Will See You Now, Mr. Thurber," New Yorker, XXVI (May 28, 1955), 30. For cartoon on modern doctors, see Appendix, p. 132.

[14]James Thurber, "The Future, If Any, of Comedy," Harpers, CCXXIII (December, 1961), 43.

[15]Thurber, Lanterns and Lances, p. 48.

psychronologist appeared and noted that he had no scientific data on clock-eating, and hence he could rely on no previous controlled observations. "All things, as we know, are impossible in this most impossible of all impossible worlds. That being the case, no such thing as we think has happened could have happened,"[16] he said as he dismissed himself. Next the clockoscopher entered the consultations; his "oscophy is based upon clocks, not necessarily upon their physical existence, but upon clocks as a concept."[17] He became distracted from the case when he tried to determine just how high high time was, so his services were of little help. Next, the chief diagnostician decided that the trouble was no one knew what the trouble could be, because no one had ever eaten clocks before. It was impossible for him to know whether the patient had a "clockitis, clockosis, clockoma, or clocktheria."[18] The Supreme Prosecutor in the legal case against the ogre stood up and said, "Let somebody say something, and I will object.... We have to start somewhere, even if we start nowhere."[19]

---

[16] Ibid., p. 51.

[17] Ibid., p. 52.

[18] Ibid., p. 53.

[19] Ibid., p. 54.

Eventually the case was decided: the last remaining clock was to be hung in the museum, and the ogre was forgotten. On that special day of clock-unveiling and clock-hanging, several people made speeches: "They all chose the same subjects without verbs or predicates, and the subjects were these: glorious past, unlimited opportunity, challenging future, dedication, inspired leadership, enlightened followership, rededication, moral fibre, spiritual values, outer space, inner man, higher ideals, lower taxes, unflagging enthusiasm, unswerving devotion, co-ordinated efforts, dedicated rededication, and rededicated dedication."[20] These categories were itemized by the opponent of categories, James Thurber. He thought all of the Area Men were a far cry from the Aunt Margerys and Columbus townspeople of his youth. Although so many things had changed with time, the speechmakers' topics were ironically similar.

Thurber seemed to enjoy pouring his ire on modern mass communications such as the radio, television, and advertising. "This is an age of drugged out interviews, the endless discussion panels on TV, the age in which photographers, and writers in their homes stay around the house as long as the paper hanger or the roofer. Everything is tending to get longer and longer and more

---

[20] Ibid., pp. 57-58.

shapeless.... Khrushchev talks for five hours at a press conference, and may even have got it up to 10 by the time this survey appears. (Moral: great oafs from great icons grow.)"[21]

The reporters, he said, had a compulsion to emphasize the bad news: the items of horror, terror, and calamity, which they droned out in their monotone voices. "My long Spooky Time sessions with the babble box in my living room revealed still another source of what appears to me to be a desire, or compulsion, to drive the nation crazy. This is radio's apparently incurable addiction to frightening statistics."[22] An evening with television was an endurance test for Thurber. He couldn't stand the chocolate-flavored announcers, the violence-minded writers, and the wide range of personalities who committed murder on the English language and the public's once-sounder sense of values and tastes. He predicted that with the continued rate of decline, the modern TV murder mysteries would resort to versions of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, the Bobbsey Twins, the Rover Boys, Pollyanna and Little Lord Fauntleroy.[23] Brutalization of stories such as Peter Pan

---

[21]James Thurber, "The Case for Comedy," Atlantic Monthly, CCVI (November, 1960), 99.

[22]Thurber, Lanterns and Lances, p. 164.

[23]James Thurber, "Carpe Noctem, If You Can," Atlantic Monthly, CCIX (January, 1962), 59-60.

or Peter Rabbit or "Alice Threw the Looking Glass," would be appearing on the screen. He continued to exaggerate in order to emphasize his points by phrasing the nursery rhymes "Little Boy Blew His Top," and the "Pie Eyed Peeper of Hamlin." One of the popular songs in this distorted age might well be, "I want a ghoul just like the ghoul that buried dead old dad."[24] Those comments by Thurber in the 1960's seem more trivial and less effective than the nightingale observations of a younger writer who could show idiocyncracies of maids and aunts rather than tell what was wrong with his complex world.

The English language was a concern of Thurber's which spanned many decades in his writing. He loved words; he liked to play games with them, use them, interpret them, and purposely tangle them to make some point. He was also a defender of the language, indignant at the degradation caused by "The Madison Avenue Advertising men, the men in the gray-flannel minds, deliberately taking advantage of all the slur and sloppiness, because when purists object it simply serves to spread the news of a product advertised in lousy English."[25]

As he grew older and his nights became more restless,

---

[24] Ibid., p. 61.

[25] Thurber, Lanterns and Lances, p. 44.

Thurber said he often played letter and word games rather than counting sheep. Sometimes he gave himself one letter of the alphabet and counted how many words he could remember, beginning with that one letter. He discovered "only seven capital letters are wholly or partially enclosed -- A, B, D, O, P, Q, and R,"[26] and he pondered solemnly on the "Sesumarongi, a backward tribe, but a tribe that is all around us."[27] These very Sesumarongi (Ignoramuses) of both sexes were responsible for adding the abbreviations, slang, slogans, and modern idioms to our English language. "We live, man and worm, in a time when almost everything can mean almost anything, for this is the age of gobbledygook, doubletalk, and gudde. Moral: A word to the wise is not sufficient if it doesn't make any sense."[28]

Thurber was concerned about this language which could be distorted into a meaningless maze. Confusion, rather than clarity, was the keynote in communications. "Sentences now run themselves, instead of being guided,"[29] he observed. The human mind was derailed and distraught in attempts to

---

[26] Ibid., p. 79.

[27] Ibid., p.160.

[28] Thurber, Further Fables for Our Time, p. 129.

[29] Thurber, Lanterns and Lances, p. 43.

uncomplicate the complicated channels of expression. Ironically, or perhaps intentionally, Thurber became somewhat complicated in his own pleas for simplicity: "The brain of our species is, as we know, made up largely of potassium, phosphorus, propaganda, and politics, with the result that how not to understand what should be clearer is becoming easier and easier for all of us. Sanity, soundness, and sincerity, of which gleams and stains can still be found in the human brain under powerful microscopes, flourish only in a culture of clarification, which is now becoming harder and harder to detect with the naked eye."[30]

With an ear for nuance and nonsense, Thurber recorded several examples of the misuse of words. "Her apartment was broken into so often this year, she finally had to have it burglarized,"[31] said a guest to her host. A lady once asked him, "Who do you doctor with in New York?" Thurber said he didn't know "whether she wanted to know whom I general practice with or specialize with, or whether she meant medicalwise, surgicalwise, or ophthalmologicalwise."[32] On one of the nights he tested

---

[30]Ibid., p. 120.

[31]James Thurber, "A Party of One," Holiday, XXVIII (December, 1960), 14.

[32]Thurber, Lanterns and Lances, p. 47.

his endurance against the television set, he heard the narrator begin a program by saying, "'The strongest human emotion is the mother's desire for a baby of her own.' Well, to begin with, if she is a mother she has a baby of her own."[33]

A fictitious Miss Quibble who was supposedly arguing with Thurber told him, "'The trouble with you is you just don't like no children.' 'You are wrong, Madam,' Thurber said icily. 'I do like no children.' Editor's Note: Thurber does like children but he thinks nothing of abusing truth to point up a grammatical outrage."[34]

Although words were objects of fun for Thurber, numbers were his vengeance. He disliked being identified as a license, room, social security, or statistical number. He objected to the newscaster's droning voice, unemotionally saying only twenty-four persons were killed in a plane crash or on the highways. Just as he disliked having the human mind categorized and analyzed, he also hated mathematical compilations of statistics, which in turn added to the process of the dehumanization of man. Statistics were just one more reason why Thurber mourned the present of his

---

[33]Thurber, "Carpe Noctem, If You Can," p. 59.

[34]James Thurber, "Come Across with the Facts," Saturday Review, XLIII (June 18, 1960), p. 6. See Thurber cartoon on youth, Appendix, p. 132.

later years and longed for the simpler way of life he had known as a child.

A few of Thurber's heavy-hearted pieces were both serious and angry. His pen became a sword, and laughter was sparse when he attacked vices such as vicious propaganda, false accusations, and gossip. Two stories showed Thurber's distress over something called "Guilt by exoneration." In a fable, "The Trial of the Old Watchdog," the jury said, "We find the defendant guilty ... but we think it would be better to acquit him, nonetheless. If we hang the defendant, his punishment will be over. But if we acquit him ... nobody will ever trust him again, and he will be a suspect all of the days of his life."[35] Again in an essay which was a take-off on the seasonal letter of Virginia concerning the existence of Santa Claus, Thurber says, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Thing, older than the Questing Beast, uglier than the Loch Ness monster. It speaks in many tongues and sleeps in many minds. It invades the world and mind of Man, inhabits headlines, feeds on limelight, and attacks its prey in the dark. It can't tell black from white, since it sees only red, and it tires quickly when digging for facts because they often lie deep at the roots of truth, and the Thing has learned to

---

[35]Thurber, Further Fables for Our Time, p. 101.

nourish itself on suspicions, guesses, and old accusations ..." Thurber continues, "One of the Thing's most brilliant achievements, however, was to make Man lose his faith in the practice and precept of innocence by exoneration. Now a man may be considered guilty even after he has been proven innocent. Now the scarlet letter A may stand for the awful word 'Acquitted,' and now Man, in his abject confusion, is likely to point out exonerated patriots on the street and whisper, 'There goes the accused.'"[36]

Freedom was one of Thurber's greatest causes; and in 1957 he wrote a book called The Wonderful O, which appears to be a child's tale but carries an adult message. Beneath the fantasy-level there is a plea for the word Thurber felt was so important, freedom. This novel, written less than five years before his death, is a statement of his creed; the funny people of his stories were those deprived of that "Wonderful O," freedom.

The novel, in its touches of whimsy, is reminiscent of Peter Pan or Alice In Wonderland. Black and Littlejack go to the Island of Ooroo to find jewels and power. Once they gain control of the island, Black, who hates all words containing the letter O, demands that such words be removed

---

[36]James Thurber, Credos and Curios (New York: 1962), pp. 75-76.

from the language. Clocks became cloks; moose, mse; mouse, muse. Finally a brave, patriotic group of citizens secretly meet and remember an ancient legend, similar to this situation, where the oppressed sought four things: hope, valor, love, and \--- they could not remember the fourth. Eventually Black and Littlejack are defeated, and the town and its o-less language return to normal. A magnificent statue is erected to commemorate the fourth and most wonderful o -- Freedom. In this novel Thurber created a unique plot and a humor displaying his ability to speak on many levels. One could read this to a delighted child or adult; the message could be interpreted with the abandon of the nightingale or the wisdom of the owl.

By Thurber's definition of humorist, such writers talk "largely about small matters and smally about great affairs. His ears are shut to the ominous rumblings of the dynasties of the world moving toward a cloudier chaos than ever before, but he hears with an acute perception the startling sounds that rabbits make twisting in the bushes.... He can sleep while the commonwealth crumbles but a strange sound in the pantry at three in the morning will strike terror into his stomach."[37] Sometimes, however, Thurber wandered into realms of political and

---

[37]Thurber, My Life and Hard Times (New York: 1933), p. 11.

national events. One of the central concerns in The Male Animal was freedom of speech. A busy-body college alumnus, Ed Keller, decided it was time the school was rid of liberals and left-wingers. Although Ed does not define these terms, his mission is similar to that of Babbitt: "When it comes to these blab-mouth, fault-finding, pessimistic, cynical University teachers, let me tell you that during this golden coming year it's just as much our duty to bring influence to have those cusses fired as it is to sell all the real estate and gather in all the good shekels we can."[38] A friend of Ed's, Tommy Turner, has decided to read a letter to his literature classes, written by Bartolomeo Vanzetti; who, with Nicola Sacco, was tried and convicted of murder and robbery in the early 1920's. When Ed cannot persuade Tommy to drop his plan, he mentally places Tommy in the ranks of those who should be distrusted. The closing scenes of the play indicate that Tommy will carry out his letter-reading, with the support of many in the college who Ed thought were on his side. "When Mr. Thurber showed the chief character of The Male Animal overcoming futility, rising above fear and ineptitude, and in the end acting to assert his belief in the importance of free speech, the action in

---

[38]Sinclair Lewis, "Babbitt's Speech," recorded in Donald Lee and William Moynihan's Using Prose (New York: 1962), p. 499.

the play was a symbol of something happening in America today. Like Mr. Thurber's harried little professor, Americans, after a period of doubt, despair, uncertainty, are beginning to feel that there are some things about which they share convictions."[39]

In 1960 Thurber told an interviewer, "We had better lay off these damned Congressional investigations of our own culture.... We used to make fun of our Congressman. Now we're scared of them. This season they're liable to be investigating the press, the pulpit, professors, doctors, everybody. I think comedy has declined in the whole world, become farcical. The damned television sponsors and producers are to blame. They haven't learned you don't have to play down to a mythical stupid American audience."[40] This outburst was one of the few which Thurber made on national affairs in a serious tone. Jokingly he said of world madness, "I think there's been a fall-out of powdered fruitcake -- everyone's going nuts. I am the great hope of the mentally institutionalised because I'm the boy who could sell nuttiness and stay out of the nut house."[41]

---

[39]Blair, Horse Sense in American Humor, pp. 310-311.

[40]"First Nights: Thurber on Stage," Newsweek, LV (January 18, 1960), 82.

[41]Thurber..An Old Hand at Humor," p. 108. See Thurber cartoons, Appendix, p. 133.

Thurber commented, at one time or another, on most of the man-made structures of society: government, morals and mores, education, disciplines of knowledge, classes of human beings. As he neared death, his writings became a bit more strained and superficial. The owl of dark blindness became disillusioned with his times. "The same jauntily pessimistic acceptance of the worst grew perceptively darker toward the end. The moral darkness he saw spreading everywhere did not, however, impair his love of life any more than had the physical blindness which had struck so tragically so early in his career nor did it show his warm affection for his own past."[42]

Perhaps the last years of Thurber's writing fulfilled the prophecy of the owl of old who said of the nightingale:

> For any mirth may last so long
> That dislike of it waxeth strong;
> For harp or pipe or song of bird
> Displeaseth if too long 'tis heard.
> Never so merry a song may be
> But to disgust shall turn its glee
> If it shall last till it annoy.[43]

The humor of the owl Thurber was not displeasing nor disgusting, but his merry song had taken on a much more somber note. As a critic of the man-made in society,

---

[42]Charles Brady, "What Thurber Saw," Commonweal, LXXV (December 8, 1961), 276.

[43]John Manly, English Prose and Poetry (New York: no date), p. 16.

Thurber had unraveled the threads of his soul far, far away from the things closest to his heart. The nightingale became the owl, whose years brought on increasing darkness.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The two natures of Thurber's humor, light-hearted and heavy-hearted, roughly correspond to his transition from youth to age. However, the divisions are not that precise, for his approaches to humor, the nightingale and the owl, overlapped his years.

Thurber believed that good humor is more than just funny; he hoped that his writings might also do some good. He held up the follies of man, like a mirror, and gave them his own angle of distortion in order to make his points humorously. Because of his fluent style, the common incidents he chose and enlarged, and his deep interest in people, his writings appealed to an audience which far surpassed urban sophisticates.

The personal writings of Thurber are delightfully magnified to include the humorous and happy while ignoring the painful and sad. He accepted his family and friends as they were, enjoying their idiosyncrasies and oddities without analyzing their behavior. In his nostalgic happy memories of Columbus, Ohio, Thurber was closest to the nightingale gaiety. When he wrote of his friends on the New Yorker, the nightingale tone added a note of the owl's wisdom and judgment.

Animals, as well as people, were special interests of Thurber; he enjoyed owning and writing about his

friends of other species. He saw animals in a peaceful co-existence with nature, one which man had given up when he attempted to perfect his own speech and intelligence. Animals, he said, by relying on their natural instincts, were much more adjusted than Man. So when Man unquestioningly accepted his supremacy over beasts, Thurber thought Man was hypocritically vain.

As a fabulist, Thurber used animals as the teachers of man. These humanized animals enact follies in such a way that the reader can laugh at their foolishness while he is being pulled along toward Thurber's moral. James Thurber's special contribution to the fable tradition is a twist at the end of the story, yielding a surprising conclusion.

One of his major themes concerns the eternal battle between sexes in which Thurber portrayed two unevenly matched opponents: the aggressive, overbearing, unfeminine woman, and the weak, defenseless, suppressed man. Thurber was one man speaking for all men against the enemy, woman. But in doing so, he also criticized the male for allowing this revolution of woman from the home to the bar stools and business offices.

In his opposition to the invasion of the mind and privacy, and the lowered standards of the mass communications' media, Thurber was also a social critic. Advertising, television, radio and the publications had dropped

their once-higher standards to meet the demands of a society with little taste. Thurber objected to the specialization, mechanization and dehumanization of Man. The stronger and more obvious his attacks on the vices he saw in his world, the further Thurber moved toward the position of the cynical owl who hoots at mankind from his thicket-perch.

James Thurber, one of the greatest Twentieth Century American humorists, thus had a remarkable vision, considering the near-blindness which obscured his world.

APPENDIX

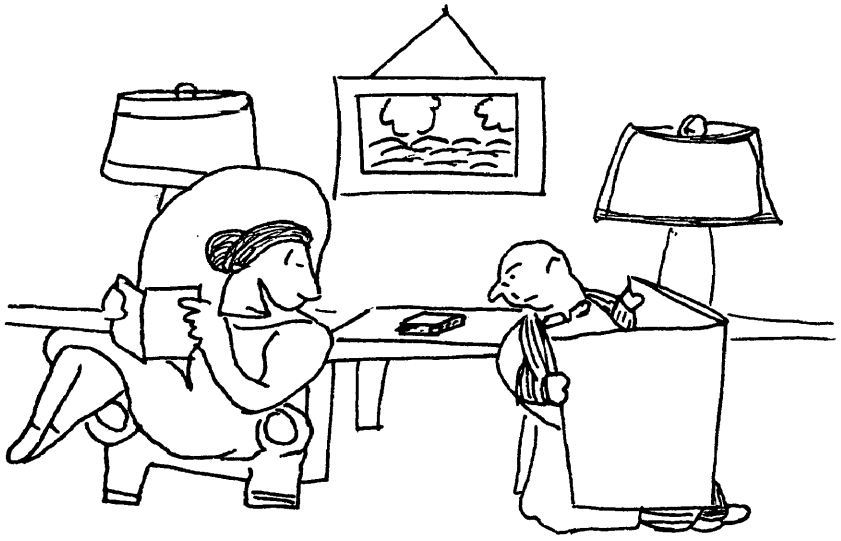
APPENDIX

THE THURBER GALLERY

The following pages are filled with Thurber's cartoons, doodles, and drawings. They represent the artistic results of twenty-five years of what Thurber called fun and relaxation. During that last decade when he could no longer see to do the drawing he loved, his writings reflected a more cynical and disillusioned humor.

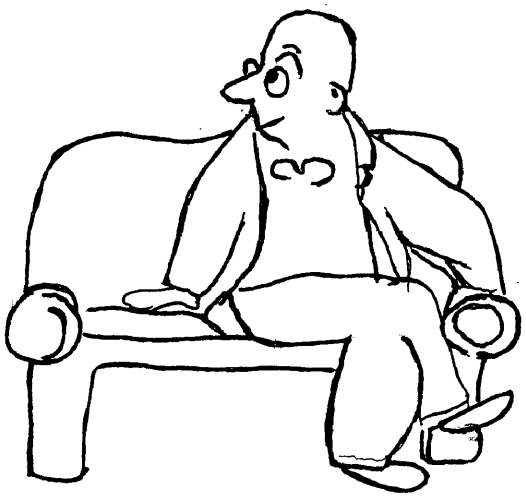
The simple, sometimes obscure and incomplete lines of these cartoons reveal Thurber's whimsical, carefree style. He did not pretend to be an accomplished artist; he merely wanted to offer his messages pictorially and humorously. When he uses captions, they leave the reader to construct the past and to rationalize how such incidents could occur. His cast includes small, insignificant men and shapeless, potato-sack garbed women. As "beaten-down" married couples they lounge and entertain in living rooms of tasteless furniture and art pieces.

The following cartoons were selected to complement the thesis material and to represent Thurber, the artist. Thurber's drawings are indeed an integral part of his self-expression.

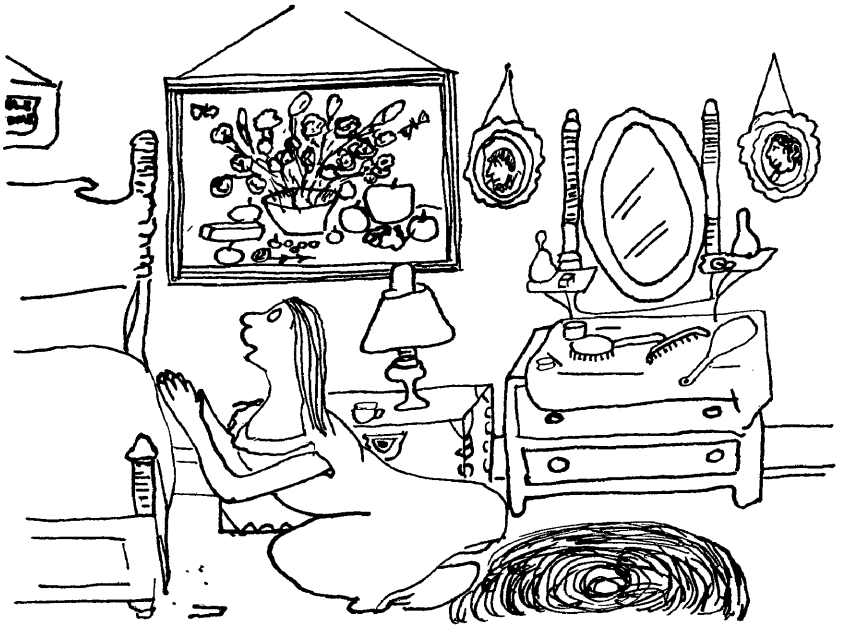


"IT'S OUR OWN STORY EXACTLY!
HE BOLD AS A HAWK, SHE SOFT AS THE DAWN."

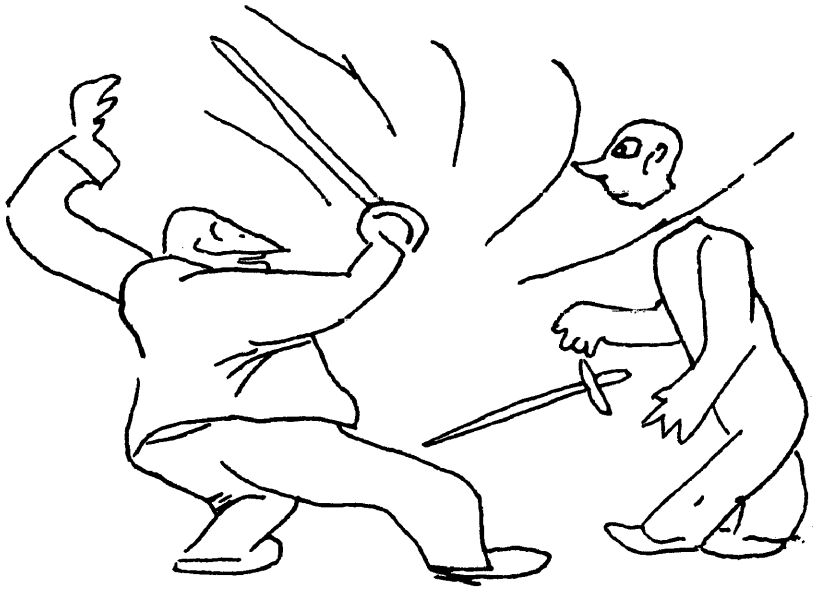
"WELL, IF I CALLED THE WRONG NUMBER, WHY
DID YOU ANSWER THE PHONE?"



A TYPICAL THURBER MALE



"...AND KEEP ME A NORMAL, HEALTHY, AMERICAN GIRL."

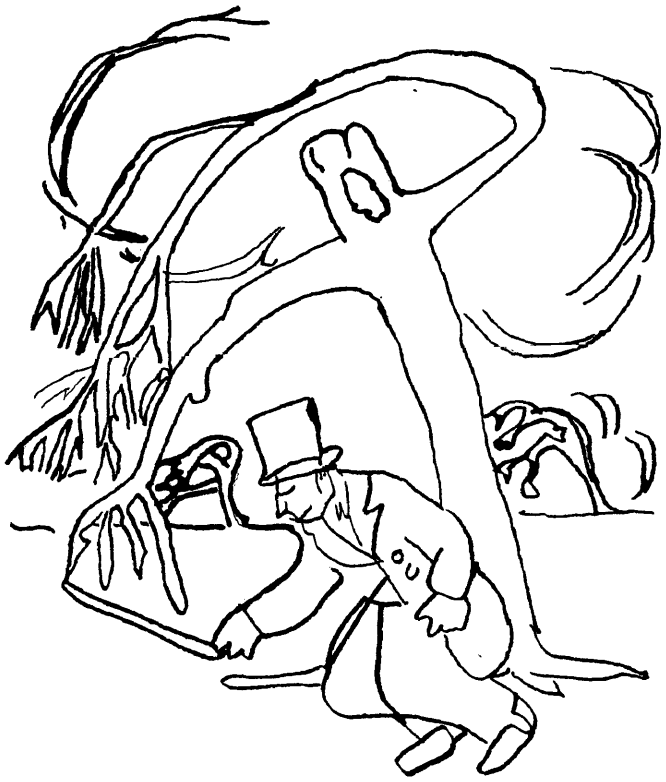


"TOUCHE ! "

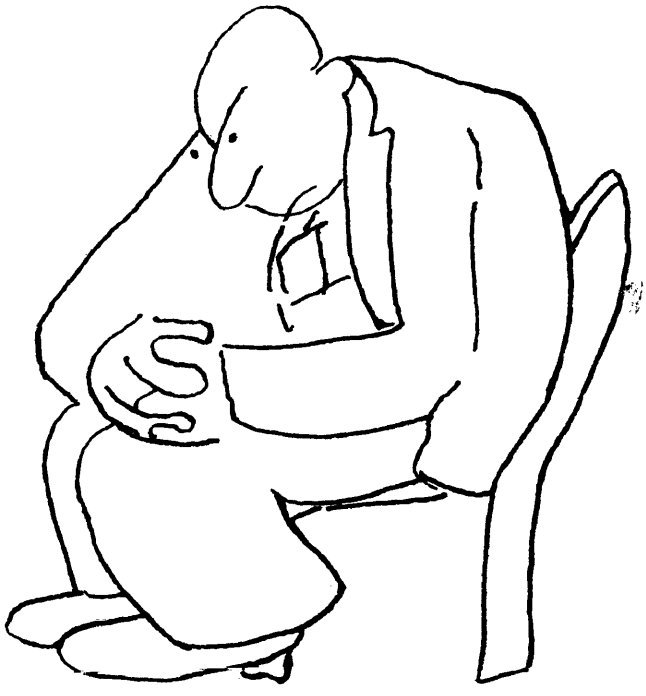
"THERE'S NO USE YOU TRYING TO SAVE ME, MY GOOD MAN."

"'DUSTING,' SAID GERTIE."

"ELECTRICITY WAS LEAKING ALL OVER THE HOUSE."



"HE CAUGHT THE SAME DISEASE THAT WAS KILLING CHESTNUT TREES."



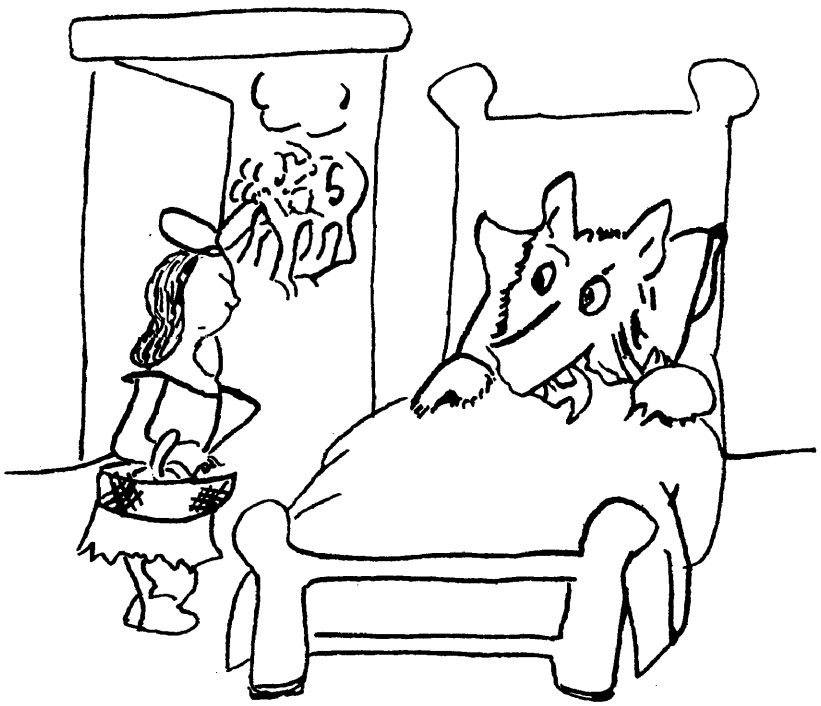
"WOLENCIECWCZ WAS TRYING TO THINK."

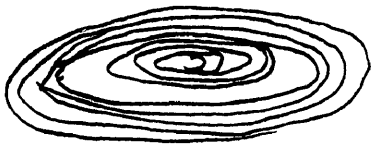
THURBER'S BIOLOGY INSTRUCTOR

"WE DRILLED WITH OLD SPRINGFIELD RIFLES."

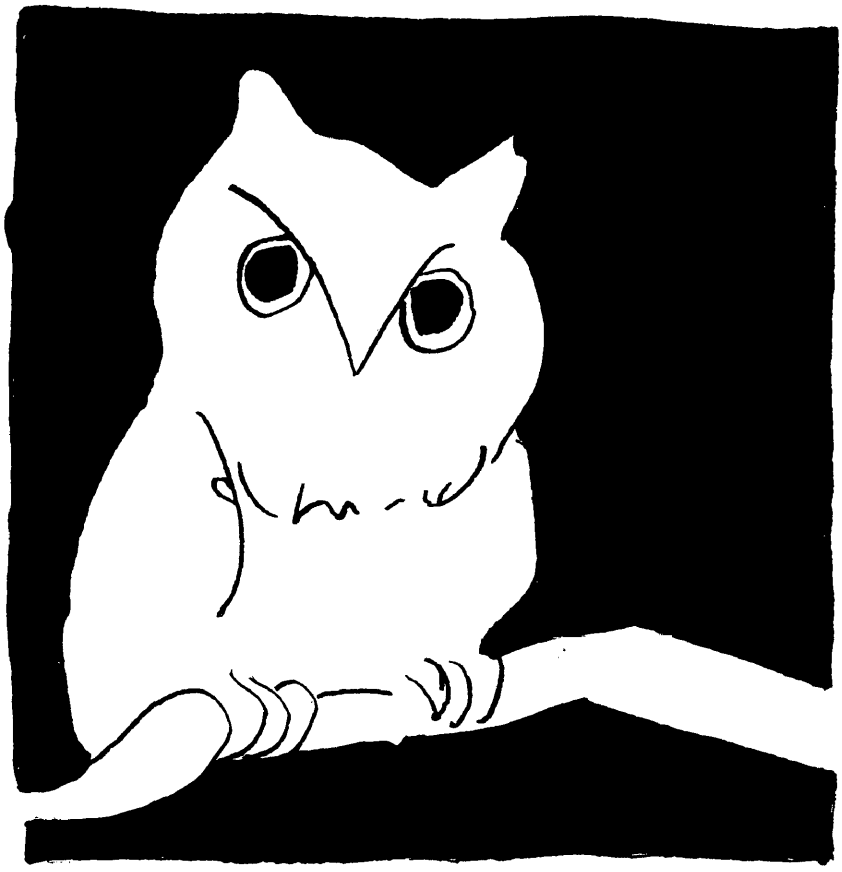
"THAT'S MY FIRST WIFE UP THERE, AND THIS IS THE PRESENT MRS. HARRIS."

"ALL RIGHT, HAVE IT YOUR WAY--YOU HEARD A SEAL BARK."

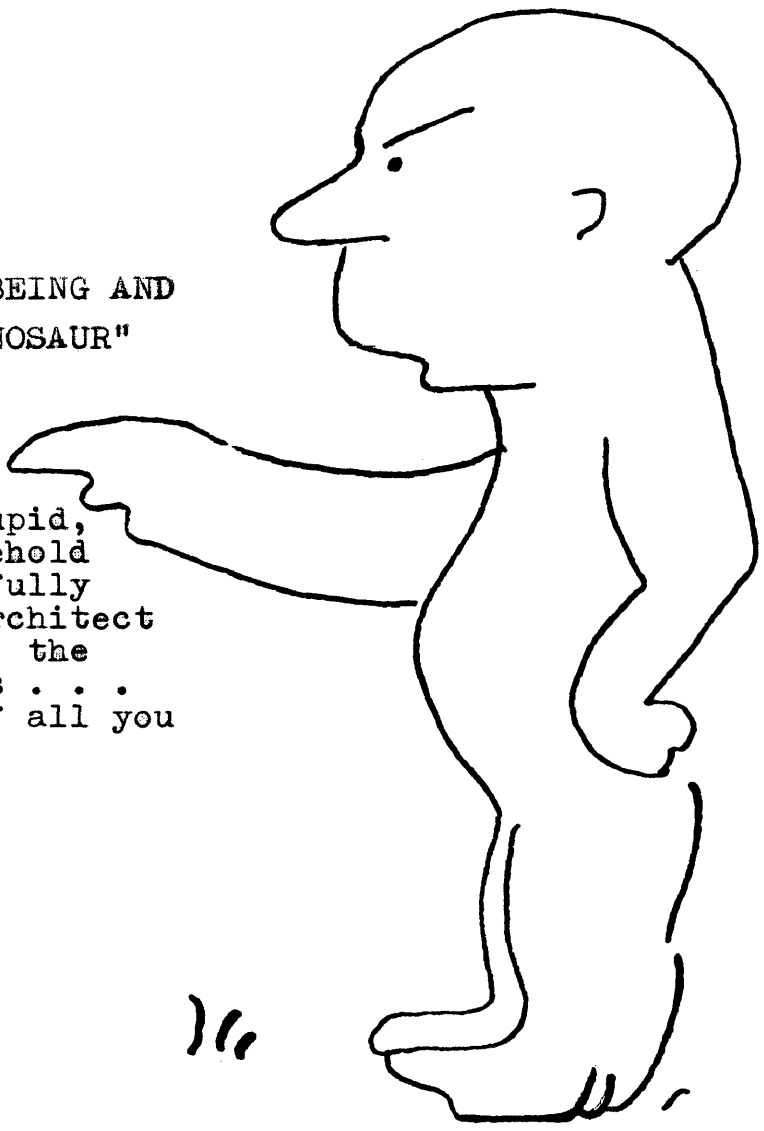


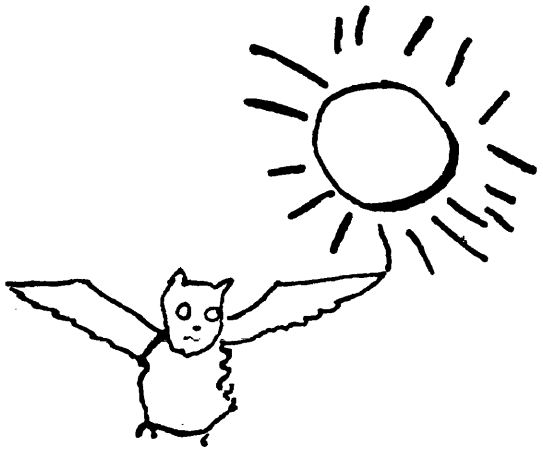


"THE LITTLE GIRL AND THE WOLF."

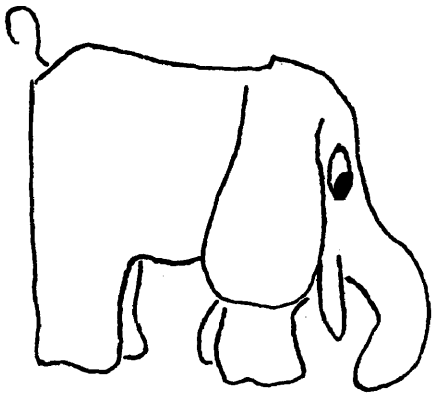


"THE HUMAN BEING AND
THE DINOSAUR"

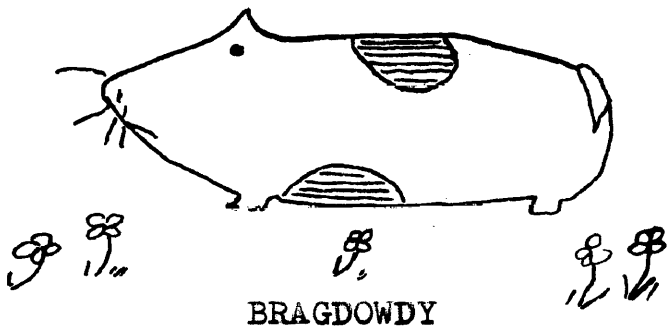




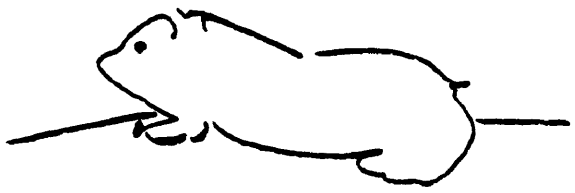
"THE BAT WHO GOT THE HELL OUT"



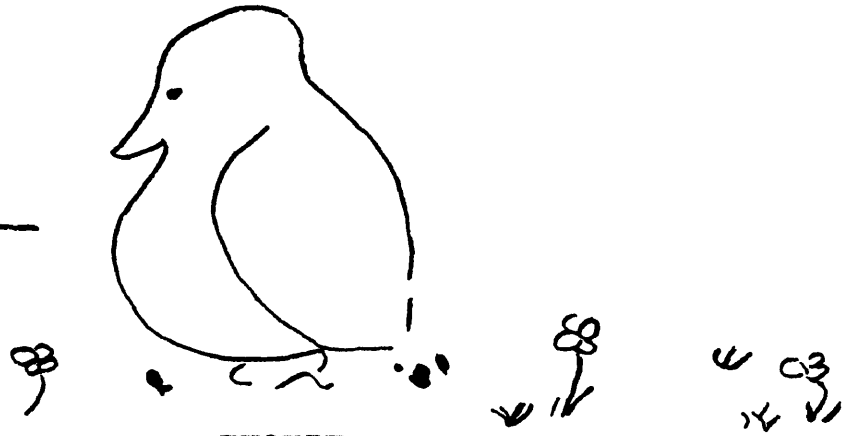
ELEPHANT



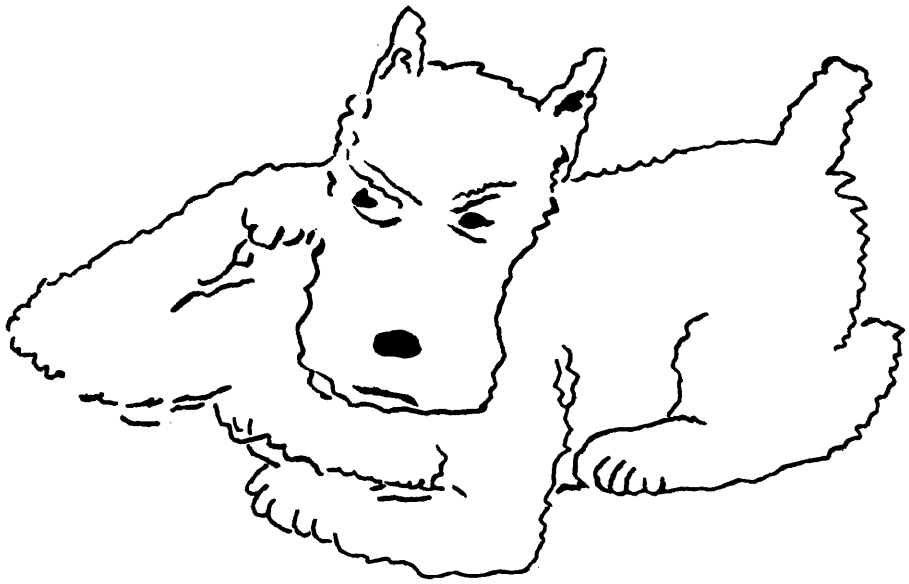
BRAGDOWDY



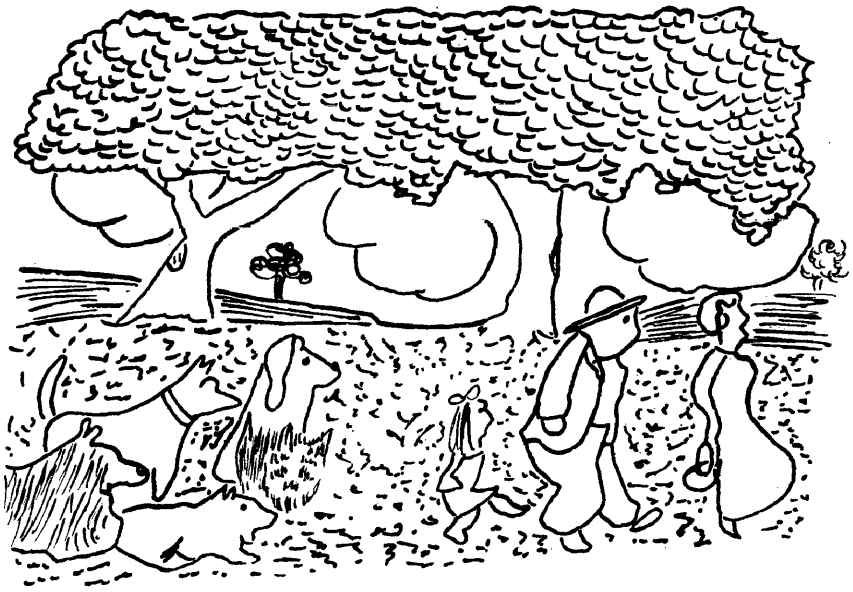
LEMMING



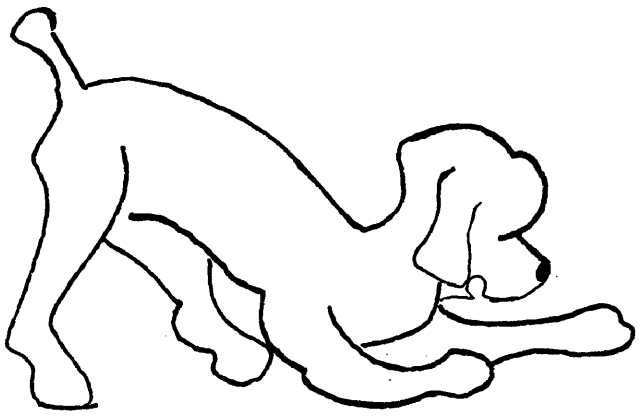
PHOEBE



"MUGGS . . . THE DOG THAT BIT PEOPLE"



"THERE GO THE MOST INTELLIGENT OF ALL ANIMALS."



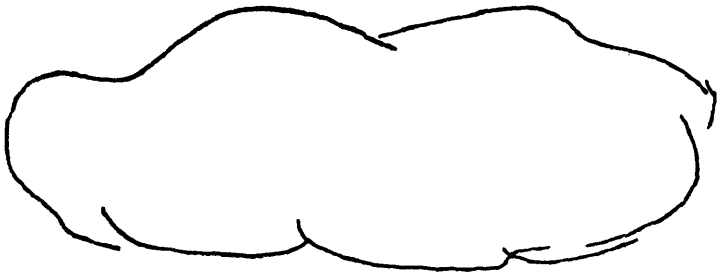
POODLE

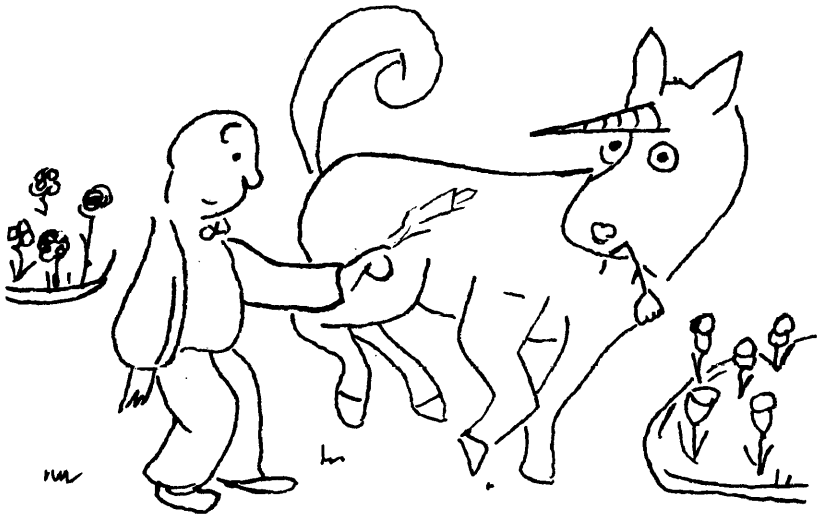
BLOODHOUND

"HERE'S TO THE OLD-TIME SALOON, STRANGER ! "

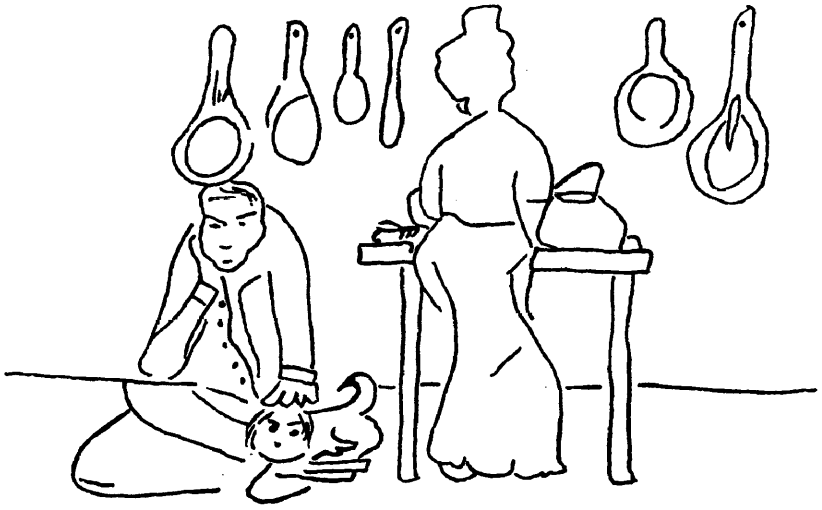
"STOP ME !"

"HOME"

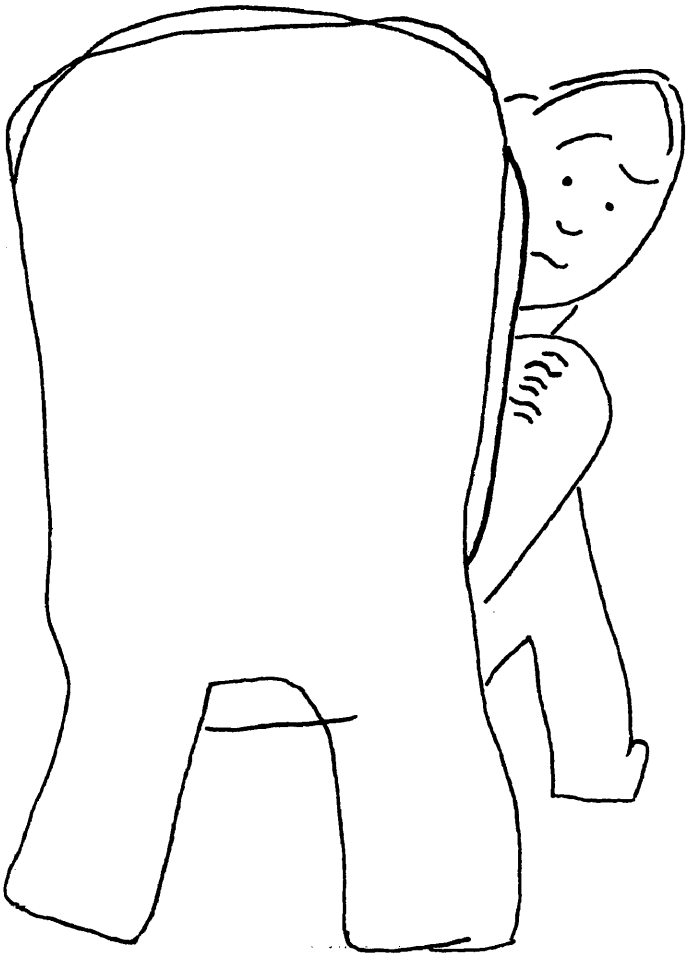




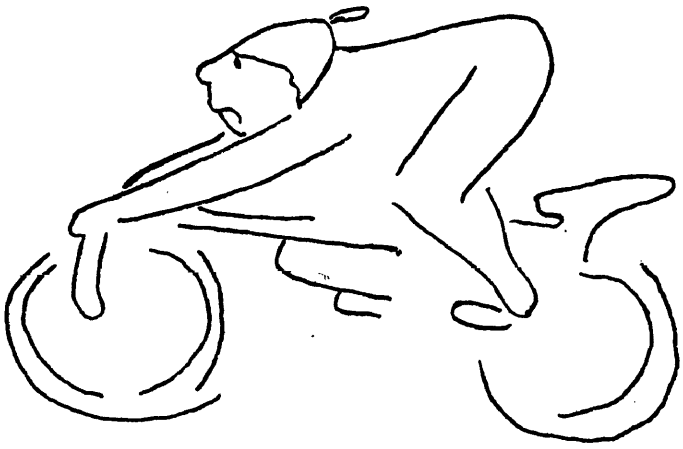
"THE UNICORN IN THE GARDEN"



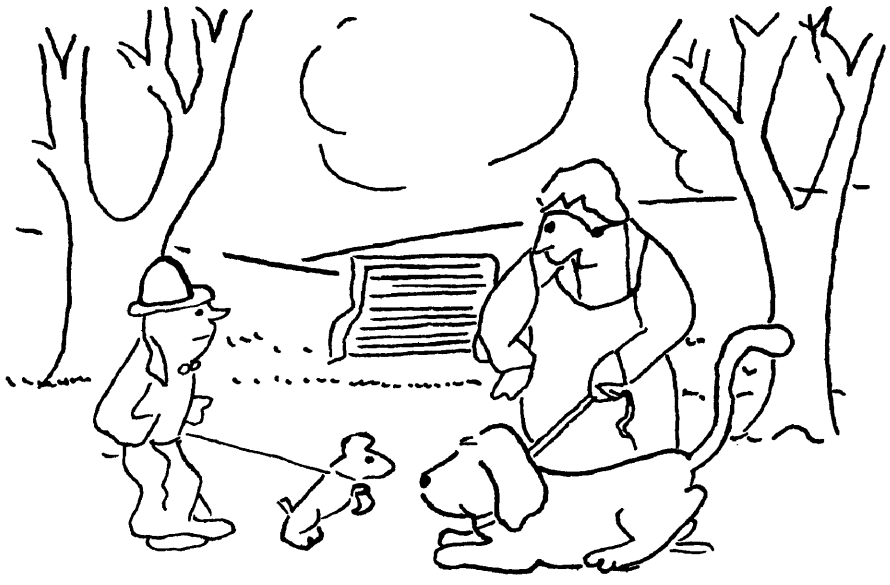
DIVERSION SUBTERFUGE--FUDGE-MAKING



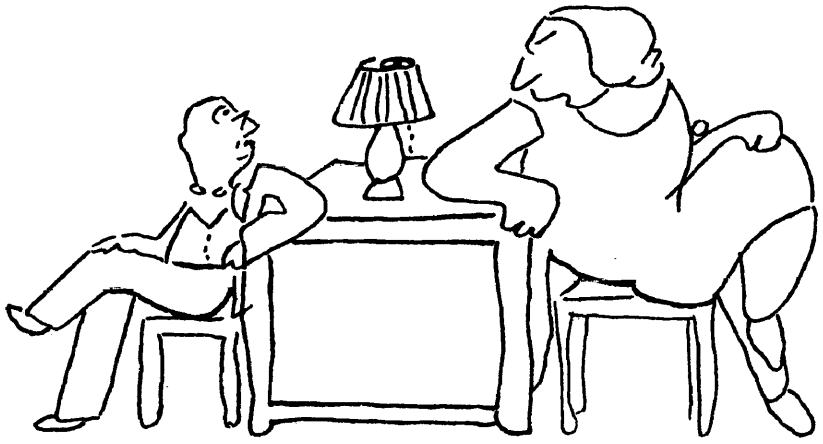
"Here we have that strange, alert furtiveness which instantly overtakes a man when he beholds a woman doing something which he does not thoroughly understand."



SEX SUBSTITUTES: SIX-DAY BICYCLE RACING



"ARE YOU TWO LOOKING FOR TROUBLE, MISTER?"

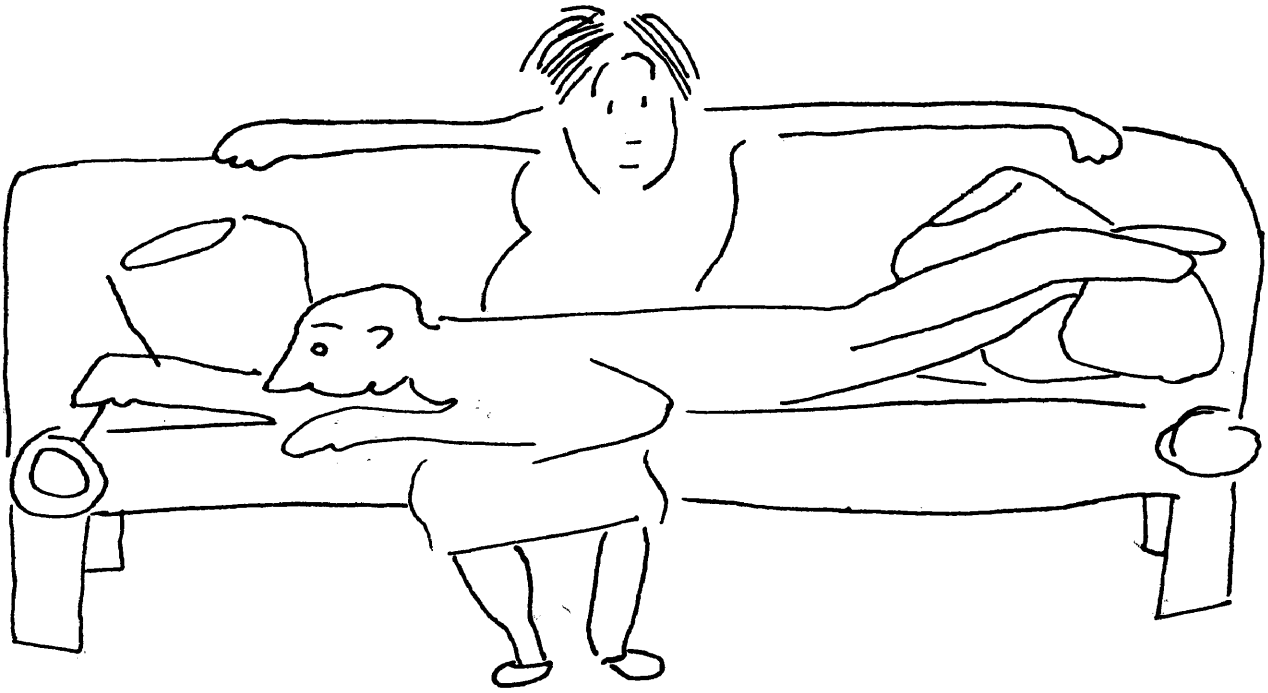


"I'M GETTING TIRED OF YOU THROWING YOUR WEIGHT AROUND!"

"WHY DO YOU KEEP RAISING ME WHEN YOU KNOW I'M BLUFFING?"

THURBER'S AGGRESSIVE FEMALE

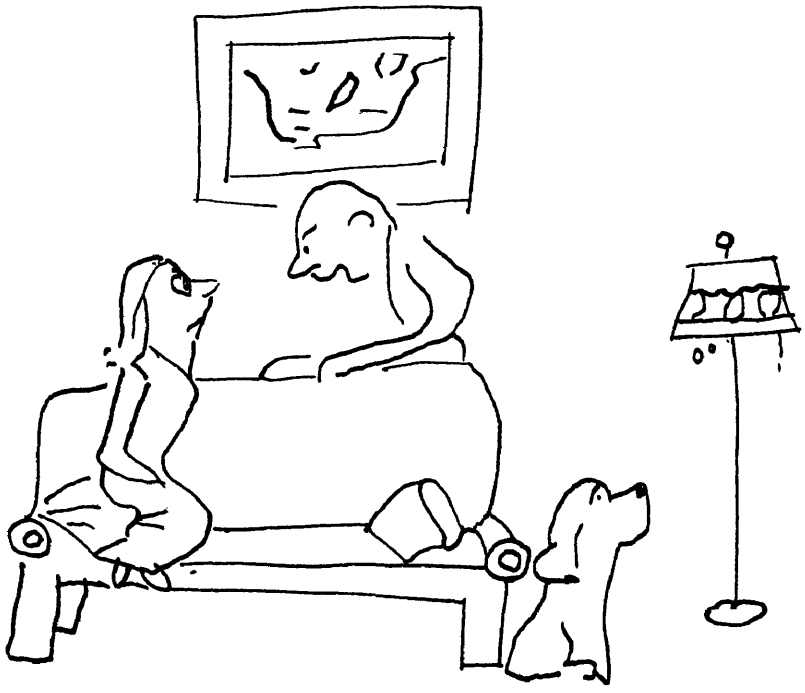
"YOO-HOO, IT'S ME AND THE APE MAN."



"YOU'RE THE ONLY WOMAN THAT EVER LET ME ALONE."

"GET A LOAD OF THIS SUNSET, BABE!"

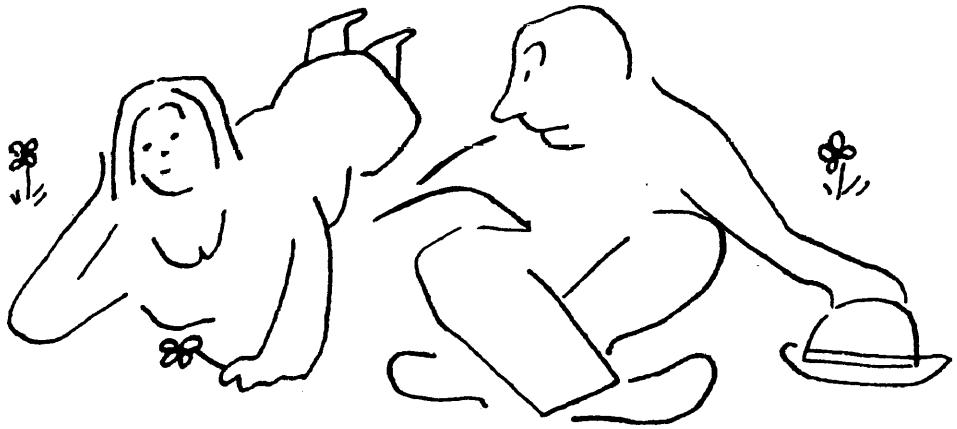
"I LOVE THE IDEA OF THERE BEING TWO SEXES, DON'T YOU?"



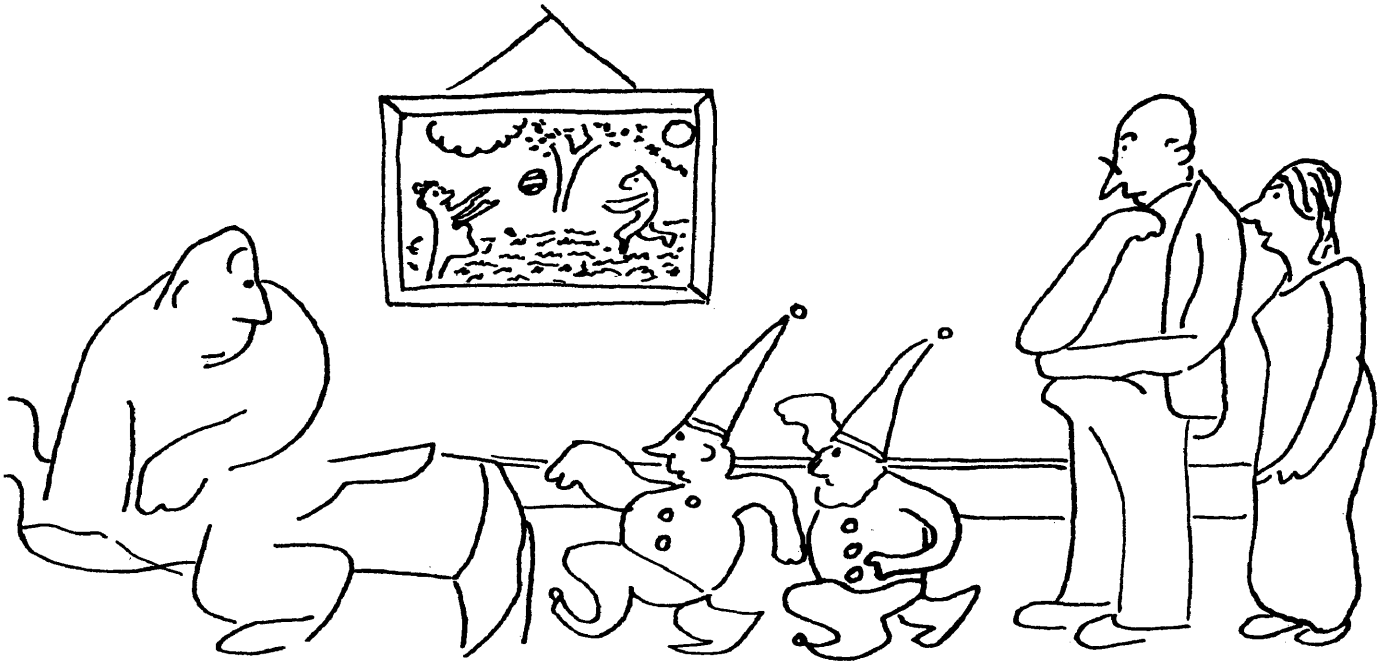
"WHERE DID YOU GET THOSE BIG BROWN EYES AND THAT TINY MIND?"

"YOU SAID A MOMENT AGO THAT EVERYBODY YOU LOOK AT SEEMS TO BE A RABBIT. NOW JUST WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT, MRS. SPRAGUE?"

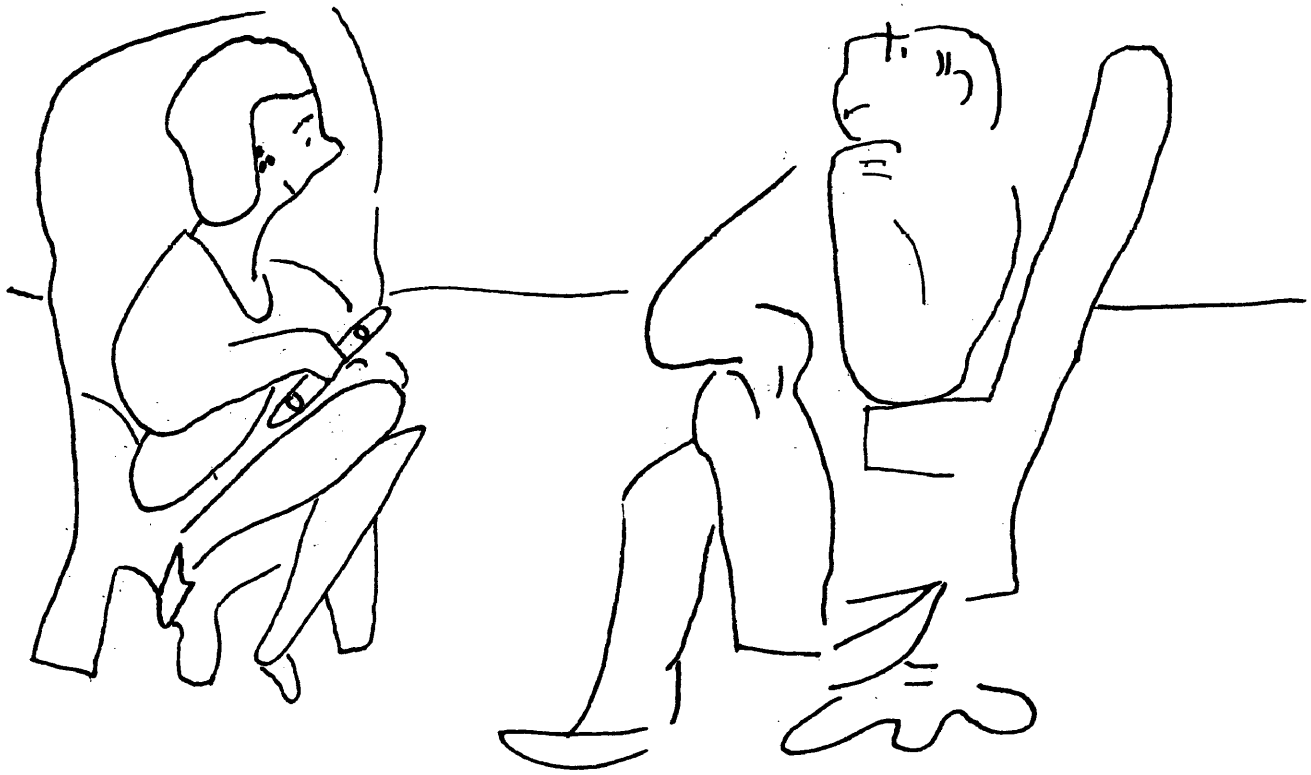
"WELL, I'M DISENCHANTED, TOO. WE'RE ALL DISENCHANTED."



"I TOLD THE ANALYST EVERYTHING EXCEPT MY EXPERIENCE WITH MR. RINESFOOS."

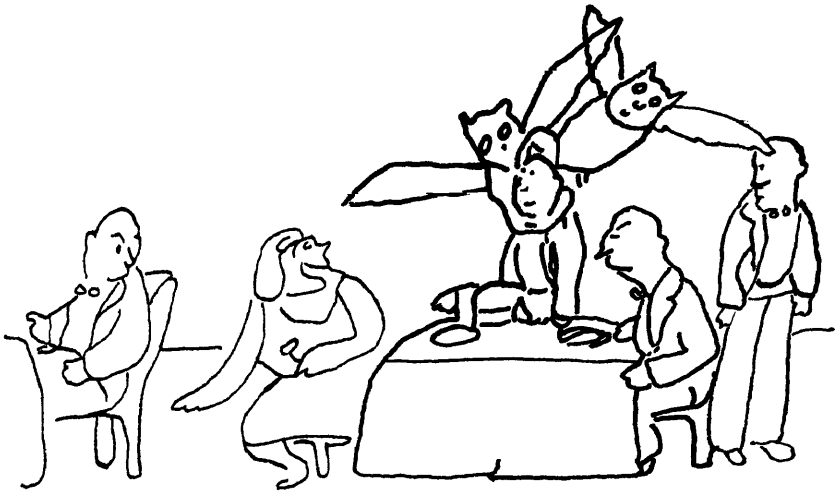


"HE CLAIMS SOMETHING KEEPS FOLLOWING HIM, DOCTOR."



"I KEEP TOYING WITH THE IDEA OF SUICIDE, DOCTOR."

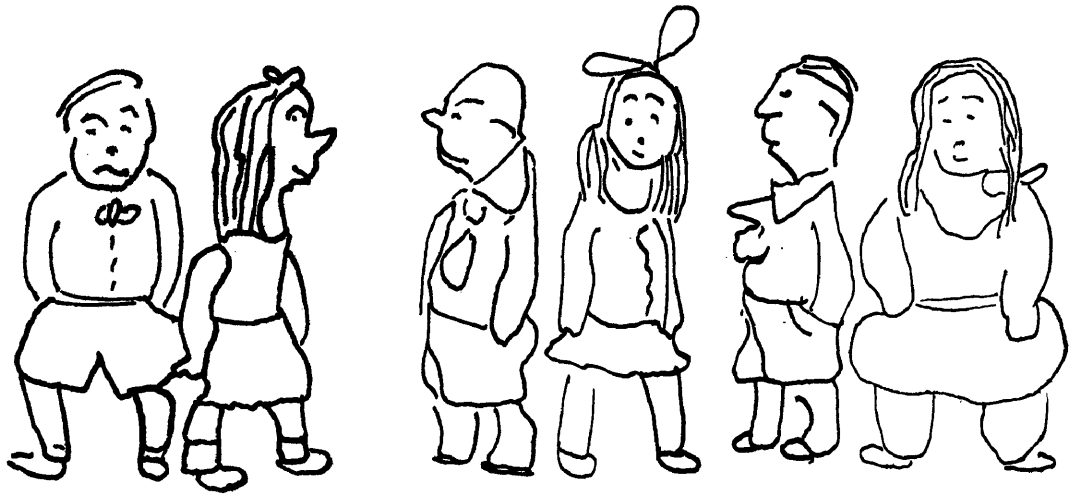
"YOU'RE NOT MY PATIENT, YOU'RE MY MEAT, MRS. QUIST."



"LOOK OUT! HERE THEY COME AGAIN!"

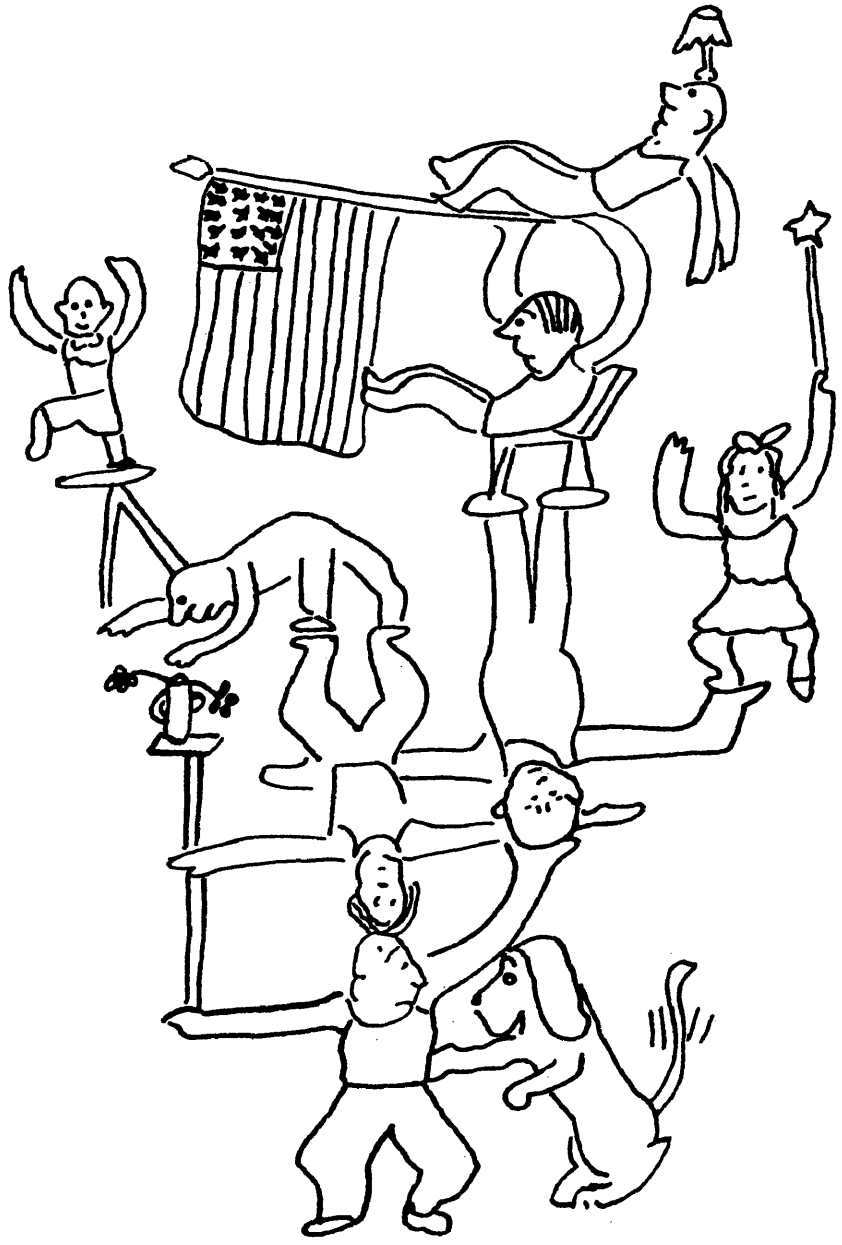
"WHY DON'T YOU GET DRESSED, THEN, AND GO TO PIECES LIKE A MAN?"

"YOUR AILMENT IS ON THE TIP OF MY TONGUE, MRS. CARTRIGHT--LET ME THINK."



YOUTH

DESTINATIONS



THURBER'S LAW -- THERE IS NO SAFETY IN NUMBERS OR IN ANYTHING ELSE: THE CLAW OF THE SEAPUSS GETS US ALL IN THE END.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Birchman, Willis. Faces and Facts. New York: Privately Published, 1937.

Blair, Walter. Horse Sense in American Humor. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.

Blair, Walter. Native American Humor. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, Inc., 1960.

Bolton, Sarah K. Famous American Authors. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Co., 1933.

Eastman, Max. Enjoyment of Laughter. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936.

Encyclopedia Britannica, S. V. "Fables," 1962.

Esar, Evan. The Humor of Humor. New York: Horizon Press, 1952.

Feinberg, Leonard. The Satirist. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1963.

Hart, James. Oxford Companion to American Literature. New York: Oxford Univereity Press, 1948.

Herzberg, Max. The Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1962.

Kunitz, Stanley. Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement. New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1955.

Lee, Donald and Moynihan, William. Using Prose. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1962.

Manley, John. English Prose and Poetry. New York: Ginn and Company, no date.

Rourke, Constance. American Humor. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1931.

Spiller, Robert E. A Time of Harvest. New York: Hill and Wong, 1962.

Spiller, Thorp, Johnson, Canby. Literary History of the United States. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953.

Thurber, James. Alarms and Diversions. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957.

_____. Credos and Curios. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

_____. Fables for Our Time. New York: Harper Brothers, 1940.

_____. Further Fables for Our Time. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956.

_____. Lanterns and Lances. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961.

_____. Let Your Mind Alone. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937.

_____. Many Moons. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943.

_____. Middle Aged Man on the Flying Trapeze. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935.

_____. My Life and Hard Times. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933.

_____. My World and Welcome To It. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1942.

_____. The Beast In Me and Other Animals. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1948.

_____. The Seal in the Bedroom and Other Predicaments. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932.

_____. The Thirteen Clocks. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952.

_____. The Thurber Album. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952.

_____. The Thurber Carnival. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945.

_____. The Years With Ross. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1957.

_____. Thurber Country. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955.

_____. Thurber's Dogs. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955.

_____. The White Deer. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945.

_____. The Wonderful O. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957.

Thurber, James and Nugent, Elliott. The Male Animal. New York: Random House, 1940.

Thurber, James and White, E. E. Is Sex Necessary? New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929.

Weber, Brom, editor. An Anthology of American Humor. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1962.

Wright, Milton. What's Funny and Why. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1939.

Yates, Norris. The American Humorist. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1964.

Periodicals

Bacon, Leonard. "Humors and Careers," Saturday Review of Literature, XX (April 29, 1939), 3-4.

Benet, William Rose. "Carnival with Spectres," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVIII (February 3, 1945), 9.

Brady, Charles. "What Thurber Saw," Commonweal, LXXV (December 8, 1961), 274-276.

Breit, Harvey. "Mr. Thurber Observes a Serene Birthday," New York Times, (December 4, 1949), pp. 17, 78.

_____. "Talk with James Thurber," New York Times, (June 29, 1952), p. 19.

"Carnival of Dementia," Newsweek, XXV (February 5, 1945), 102, 104, 111.

Coates, Robert M. "Thurber, Inc.," Saturday Review of Literature, XXI (December 2, 1939), 10-11, 28, 30.

DeVries, Peter. "James Thurber: The Comic Prufrock," Poetry, LXIII (December 1943), 150-159.

Downing, Francis. "Thurber," Commonweal, XLI (March 9, 1945), 518-519.

Elias, Robert H. "James Thurber: The Primitive, the Innocent, the Individual," American Scholar, XXVII (Summer 1958), 355-363.

Fadiman, Clifton. "Reading I've Liked," Holiday, XXXIII (March 1963), 57-58.

"First Nights: Thurber on Stage," Newsweek, LV (January 18, 1960), 82.

Florance, Howard. "Has America Lost Its Sense of Humor," Saturday Review, XI (March 9, 1957), 9-11.

Golden, Harry. "Who's on the Dias," Saturday Review, XLI (October 18, 1958), 7.

Harris, Sydney, "Thurber for Everyman," Saturday Review, X. (November 30, 1957), 26.

"James Thurber," New Yorker, XXXVII (November 11, 1961), 247.

"James Thurber, Aphorist for an Anxious Age," Time, LXXVIII (November 10, 1961), 81.

"Jim," Newsweek, LVIII (November 13, 1961), 35-36.

"Little Reviews," Newsweek, VI (December 7, 1935), 48.

Marshall, Margaret. "Notes by the Way," Nation, CLIV (November 14, 1942), 515.

"Men, Women, and Thurber," Time, XLII (November 15, 1943), 38.

"Obituary Notes," Publisher's Weekly, CLXXX (November 13, 1961), 27.

"One for the Book," Saturday Evening Post, CCXIII (April 5, 1941), 4.

"Priceless Gift of Laughter," Time, LVIII (July 9, 1951), 88-95.

"Salute to Thurber," Saturday Review, XLIV (November 25, 1961), 14-18, 63-64.

Shulman, Max. "American Humor, Its Cause and Cure," Yale Review, LI (Autumn 1961), 119-124.

"Speaking of Pictures," Life, XV (October 25, 1943), 15

"Speaking of Pictures," Life, XVIII (February 19, 1945), 12-14.

"That Thurber Woman," Newsweek, XXII (November 22, 1943), 84-85.

"The Reeves and the Grotches," Time, LXV (February 12, 1945), 94.

Thurber, James. "A Moment with Mandy, Readers Digest, LXXVI (April 1960), 117-120.

_____. "Advice From a Blind Writer: Be Sure to Do the Right Thing and Live to See," Newsweek, LV (February 1, 1960), 48-49.

_____. "A Party of One," Holiday, XXVIII (December 1960), 11-14, 16.

_____. "Carpe Noctem, If you Can," Atlantic Monthly, CCIX (January 1962), 59-61.

_____. "Come Across with the Facts," Saturday Review, XLIII (June 18, 1960), 6.

_____. "Ladies' and Gentlemen's Guide to Modern English Usage," Scholastic, XXV (September 22, and October 20, 1934), 8.

_____. "Listen To This Dear," Harper's Magazine, CLXIV (January 1932), 250-252.

_____. "Maniac in the Moon," New Yorker, XXXVII (August 19, 1961), 22-24.

_____. "The Case for Comedy," Atlantic Monthly, CCVI (November 1960), 97-99.

_____. "The Danger in the House," Harper's Magazine, CCXXV (September 1962), 43-46.

_____. "The Darlings at the Top of the Stairs," Harper's Magazine, CCXX (February 1960), 35-36.

_____. "The Future, If Any, of Comedy," Harper's Magazine, CCXXII (December 1961), 40-45.

_____. "The Man Who Was Comedy," Theater Arts, XLV (August 1961), 8-9.

_____. "The Other Room," Harper's Magazine, CCXXV (July 1962), 72-76.

_____. "The Porcupines and the Artichokes," Atlantic Monthly, CCIV (October 1959), 35-37.

_____. "The Psychosemanticist Will See You Now, Mr. Thurber," New Yorker, XXXI (May 28, 1955), 28-31.

Thurber, James. "The Saving Grace," Atlantic Monthly, CCIV (November 1959), 61-64.

_____. "The Thurber Method of Acting," New York Times, (October 16, 1960), pp. 28, 33, 36.

_____. "The Wizard of Chitenango," New Republic, LXXXI (December 12, 1934), 141-143.

_____. "Thumbs Up," Harper's Magazine, CLXII (December 1930), 123-124.

_____. "Thurber," New York Herald Tribune, XXVII (October 8, 1950), 4.

"Thurber..An Old Hand at Humor with Two Mits on Hand," Life, XLVIII (March 14, 1960), 103-108.

Thurber, James. "Thurber As Seen by Thurber," New York Times, (January 28, 1945), pp. 16-17.

"Thurber Reports His Own Play, 'The Male Animal,' with His Own Cartoons," Life, VIII (January 29, 1940), 27-28.

Weales, Gerald. "The World in Thurber's Fables," Commonweal, LXV (January 18, 1957), 409-411.

Weeks, Edward. "The Peripathetic Reviewer," Atlantic Monthly, CCVII (June 1961), 96,98.

Williams, Beryl. "White, Thurber, Nash," Saturday Review of Literature, XX (May 20, 1939), 9.

"World on All Fours," Time, XL (November 2, 1942), 100, 102-103.